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OR, The Detective's Ordeal.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK.)

AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON, THE FALCON DETECTIVE," "NIXEY'S NIP," "THE ROCKET DETECTIVE," "THE CIRCUS DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN INTRICATE DETECTIVE CASE.

"Is Mainwaring in the ante-room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask him to come to me."

The speaker was Mr. David Winkerton, chief of the up-town branch of a prominent private detective agency, who had just hustled into his inner office by a private door, at about noon of a fine October day.

The person addressed was the office janitor and sometime stool-pigeon of the agency—a morose but observant old man known as Old Newthe, who at once quitted the room with a subservient bow.

THERE WAS A SHOCK, A RUMBLING REPORT, AND THE SOLID ROCK, SPLINTERED ALL AROUND THE DETECTIVE FROM UNDERNEATH, ROSE WITH HIM INTO THE AIR.

A moment later, Mainwaring entered in obedience to the summons.

He was a pale, thoughtful and singularly handsome young man, with short, jetty, curling hair, piercing coal-black eyes, and a certain fine grace or stealthiness of step and carriage that had earned for him among his associates the sobriquet of the Glider, or, more formally, the Gliding Detective.

"Mainwaring," said the chief, "there's an odd case just come in, which I think you can attend to better than any other man on the staff."

The young man slightly nodded in acknowledgment of the compliment, folded his arms, and at once became all attention.

"The case, in brief, is this," pursued Mr. Winkerton. "A certain wealthy old gentleman here in Harlem, a confirmed invalid, is suspicious that he is being slowly and systematically poisoned. His physician is of the same opinion, though thoroughly mystified as to the nature of the drug being secretly administered, and the identity of the criminal. You are to investigate without causing your true character to be suspected."

Mainwaring's knitted brow cleared.

"Nothing can be easier," he observed.

"How shall you manage?"

"Accompany the physician to the invalid's bedside in the character of a professional nurse."

"Good! and then?"

"This will enable me to converse privately and freely with the invalid. Then I shall regretfully discover that I cannot undertake the nursing of the sick man, but that a competent friend of mine can. The doctor goes for him while I keep watch. The doctor returns with Ichabod Taylor, who, as you know, was a professional nurse before becoming a member of our staff."

"Excellent."

"Having thus protected the invalid against future poisoning attempts, I am at liberty to make my observations and work outside the sick-room."

"Capital! The case is yours. Go to work at once."

"You haven't mentioned the name or address."

"True," and the chief handed him a memorandum-slip.

In spite of his customary self-control, the young detective started violently as he scanned the written lines.

"Calthorpe!" he exclaimed—"Mr. Peregrine Calthorpe, of the Rose Hill Mansion House, corner of One Hundred and — street and Eighth avenue."

"Exactly. So you know the house?"

"It is not unknown to me, sir."

"And probably something of the strange household, too, judging by your emotion?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me all you know of the inmates. I would compare your information with that which has been furnished me by Doctor Jackman, the family physician."

After a moment's hesitation, Mainwaring spoke collectedly, as follows:

"The Calthorpe, or Rose Hill Mansion-house, is a very old and rambling one, that has been from time to time repaired, in the midst of extensive gardens. It consists of a main or central building and two wings. The main building and north wing are occupied by the household of Mr. Peregrine, for many years a widower, and immensely wealthy. It consists of Miss Lois Calthorpe, his adopted daughter and reputed heiress; Justine Deschappelles, her French maid; a Mrs. Bentincke, the old man's housekeeper; and a number of servants. The south wing is occupied by the family of Reuben Calthorpe, younger and only brother of Peregrine Calthorpe, by inherited right of joint possession. It consists of Mr. Reuben Calthorpe, a ruined gamester and weak man, of uncertain means of support; Mrs. Calthorpe, his wife, a worn-out, unhappy and rather peevish woman of the world; and Miss Lois Calthorpe, their daughter, a very lovely and amiable young lady. With the exception of a genuine love for his niece, on the part of Peregrine Calthorpe, and a superficial intimacy existing between the young ladies—that is, between the two Loises—the resident households are not on cordial terms. Aside from Doctor Jackman, the physician for both families, and Mr. Fieldman, the elder Mr. Calthorpe's lawyer and man of business, the only privileged visitor at the house is a Mr. Carolus Digby, a dashing young man about town, reputed to be wealthy, and known to be an ardent suitor for the hand of the poorer Miss Lois—the daughter of Mr. Reuben Calthorpe. That is the extent of my information, Mr. Winkerton."

The chief of the detective agency nodded approvingly.

"Thank you, Mainwaring," said he. "It surpasses in minutiae of detail that which I had already received, and more than ever signalizes you as the man for this intricate case."

The detective inclined his head, and was about to withdraw, when the chief detained him by a gesture.

"One moment, Mainwaring," he continued.

"I must be kept as thoroughly informed as yourself in the affair."

"Certainly, sir. What more would you know?"

"How chances is that the two young ladies—the rich Mr. Calthorpe's adopted daughter and his niece—are both named Lois—an odd coincidence in itself?"

"It is odd, sir, but susceptible of an easy explanation. The niece was named for her father's mother, the adopted daughter for Mr. Peregrine Calthorpe's wife, whom he idolized while living and reveres as dead, they having never had a child of their own. The fact of the name having been previously duplicated was, of course, a pure accident."

"Humph! but, how are the young ladies distinguished apart in conversation?"

"Easily enough. The niece is addressed or referred to by her given name in full—as Lois, or Miss Lois; the adopted daughter by a childish abbreviation of the same—Issie, or Miss Issie."

"Ah! quite a complication, to be sure. One thing more, Mainwaring?"

"What is it, sir?"

"How do you happen to know so much of the strange Calthorpe households?"

"Must I answer that, sir?"

"I prefer that you would."

A slight flush had come into the young man's pale cheek, and he bit his lip under the delicate line of his wavy, jet-black mustache.

"All right, sir," said he, with a faint gesture of impatience. "It is but natural that I should know so much of the Calthorpes as I do."

"Why?"

"Miss Lois Calthorpe is secretly my betrothed—against the wishes of her parents, could they but suspect it, for they are determined to marry her to Carolus Digby, if possible. Moreover, Miss Issie Calthorpe is either my deadly enemy or my ardent admirer, I don't exactly know which. There you have it, sir." Pronouncing the last words a little brusquely.

Mr. Winkerton had smiled at first but only for an instant.

"I thank you for this expression of your confidence, Mainwaring," he gravely observed.

"The case is in your hands. Perhaps, the supposed poisoning is altogether in the old gentleman's imagination. But, see the physician at once, and report to me this evening, either in person or by verbal message. By the way, shall you want a secret follower for that purpose?"

"I think not, sir."

"Old Newthe is at your disposal, if you say the word."

"Not him, in any case!" This with a good-deal of energy.

Mr. Winkerton laughed.

"I had forgotten your distrust of the old fellow—a distrust wholly undeserved on poor Newthe's part, I am sure."

"I beg to differ with you there, sir. But I shall report to you in person. Now I am off, sir."

"Au revoir, and good-luck to you, Mainwaring! By the way, be careful of the excavations under way at the front of the building, for I believe the workmen are off to dinner."

The detective disappeared.

The agency offices occupied the fourth floor of a large new building, in East 122d street, whose front sidewalk was roughly boarded over, consequent upon a deep engine vault that had for several days been in the course of construction underneath.

Passing through the ante-room, with his wonted swift and noiseless step, the detective nodded to a few fellow-operators who were lounging there, returned Old Newthe's cringing bow with an ignoring stare, while noting a little curiously that the janitor appeared hard-breathed, as if from recent unusual exertion.

Passing along the outer passage, and down the three flights of stairs, he was crossing the temporary sidewalk to the street when the planks gave way beneath his tread, precipitating him headlong into the abyss.

A workman, accompanied by a bulldog, saw the catastrophe, and rushed to the side of the opening.

"Are you alive, sir?" he shouted down.

"Yes," was the collected response from below. "Fortunately, I've saved myself by gripping a side-timber down here. Lower me that rope dangling at your elbow, and I shall be all right."

This was accordingly done, and a moment later the detective had extricated himself, none the worse for the mishap, that might well have caused his death.

"Bless me, sir, but you're lucky!" exclaimed the workman. "How could that spot have been left so unsafe?"

"It wasn't left so, but designedly made so, perhaps for my particular benefit."

The man stared.

"A regular man-trap, I tell you!" continued the detective. "Step out here in the street, so that you can see down obliquely, and I will show you where the supports have been purposely removed, and that but freshly."

Still wondering, the man followed him, and they both stepped out over the street line.

It was doubly fortunate that they did so, for, at that instant a jar of vitriol, hurled or displaced from a window-ledge somewhere high overhead, came crashing down on the spot they had occupied, scattering its burning and corrosive contents in every direction.

The men escaped, but the workman's dog was not so fortunate. Drenched with the deadly acid, the poor brute spun shriekingly around, and in a little while expired in frightful agonies.

The horrified master exploded with profanity, and shook his fist at the upper windows.

"Accident or no accident," he yelled, "I'll have the law on the murderer of my dog!"

"No you won't, because you can't prove it as intentional," observed the detective, sympathizingly. "That jar of vitriol was on the inner window ledge of our front office, and I strongly suspect that the dose was meant for me—that the same hand hurled it as caused the secret removal of those planking-supports. But, that is to be proven. Leave it to me, and I may help you to your revenge."

The man appeared somewhat mollified by the steel-cold intelligence with which these words were uttered, and Mainwaring hurriedly proceeded on his way, to avoid the sightseers who were already collecting.

But he had hardly reached the opposite street corner before he was arrested by a friendly touch on the arm.

He recognized a young man named Luke Jardine, a personal friend and a sometime employee of the agency in an amateurish way, to whom he briefly related what had happened.

"Whom do you suspect?" asked Jardine.

"Old Newthe, as a matter of course. Say nothing, however, Luke, but quietly make your observations up in the offices, and meet me at nine this evening at our rendezvous near Mount Morris Park."

"What, Guy?" this in a lower tone; "you hope to persuade the young lady at last?"

An assenting look was his response, and they separated.

An hour later, Mainwaring was upon confidential terms with the invalid old gentleman, in the spacious sick-room, which also answered as a study and library.

Mr. Peregrine Calthorpe was in bed, propped by his pillows. The physician had come and gone, after making the necessary introduction, the arrival of the nurse-detective, Ichabod Taylor, was momentarily expected, the most trustful relations had been established between invalid and visitor, and the former was more cheerful and at ease than he had been for many a day.

"Now for a few questions, Mr. Calthorpe," remarked the detective, genially, "that is if you feel equal to them."

Mr. Calthorpe blinked his shrewd old eyes and chuckled, after a way of his.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Mainwaring," said he. "We're all safe now. Go ahead!"

"You feel sure that your medicines have been tampered with?"

"Of course, of course! So does Jackman. Else why this steady falling away when I should have been growing better?"

"True. Whom do you suspect?"

"There's the rub, young man. I suspect no one—I simply can't."

"You will not take offense at any hint that my queries may suggest?"

"None whatever. The deuce, no! Cut away."

"Does your brother or brother's wife visit you regularly?"

"Not regularly, or at all. Wouldn't have 'em here, and they know it. My niece, Lois, often comes, but she is a little angel. Oh, that is all right!"

"What is all right, sir?"

"So far as my brother Rube trying to meddle with my medicines. He may be capable of it—curse him! I think he is; a played-out gambler is capable of anything. But, he isn't down for a cent in my will, and he knows it."

Here there was a slight movement behind the bed-hangings—which were of the old-fashioned kind—suggesting a possible eavesdropper, and the detective started to explore the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO LOISES.

"You did that once before," commented the sick man, a little peevishly, as the detective resumed his seat by the couch. "Mice, mice, I tell you! Nobody would dare to eavesdrop upon me!"

"Pardon me, sir, but it strikes me that any one who would attempt to poison you might readily attempt to overhear our conversation."

This seemed to impress Mr. Calthorpe.

"Possibly, possibly!" he muttered in his jerky way. "Proceed, young man."

"You spoke of your will."

The invalid chuckled to himself, after a thoughtful pause.

"Aha, I see your drift!" said he. "You would know its purport, eh, and thus obtain a motive?"

"Exactly, sir."

"Good enough!" Then snappishly, after another chuckling pause: "Everything I have

was set down for Issie, my adopted daughter, subject to a small annuity for Reuben's Lois."

"Ah! and is Miss Issie perfectly aware of this?"

"Perfectly."

"Has she been your chief nurse up to this time?"

"Yes, assisted by Mrs. Bentincke."

There was a yet longer pause, that was presently broken by the old man, in a troubled voice.

"Drop this suggestion right here, Mr. Mainwaring, I beg of you!" he continued. "I hate to think of Issie in such a connection. I may have had my suspicions, but all's safe now, and—oh, dash it all! no more on that point, I tell you."

"As you please, sir; thought I would like to pursue the subject in a different direction."

"Certainly, certainly!"

"What was your adopted daughter's extraction?"

"Ah, hum! Little is known of it. My lamented wife and I adopted her out of an institution when she was no more than four years old. She's twenty now—same age as Reuben's Lois. Wife idolized her, and so have I—the dear little ingrate."

Nothing was escaping the detective's penetrative observation.

"Nothing was known of her parentage, then?"

"Not much. Name of Grimsby, I believe, and undoubtedly a bad lot. But that's nothing," with growing impatience. "Bad lot—disappeared—have never troubled Issie or me!"

"Who is Mrs. Bentincke?"

"Aha! you're there, are you, old truepenny, like the ghost in Hamlet? Who is Mrs. Bentincke? Why, she's Mrs. Bentincke."

"Of course; but is anything known of her history?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir; but she came to me, excellently recommended, some years back. A widow, I believe, and almost a mother to Issie. A good woman, sir—a good woman, and a capable one."

Here they were interrupted by the arrival of the newly-engaged man-nurse.

Ichabod Taylor was a short, thick-set man, of quiet, respectful air.

He said that the situation had been explained to him by the doctor, at once set about making himself acquainted with the room, and then, after carefully examining the medicines on the little table, seated himself by the head of the bed with a grave cheerfulness of manner that seemed to prepossess the invalid forthwith.

"I am at your service, sir," said he, submissively; "and I sha'n't quit my post a single instant till you are good and hearty on your feet again."

Mr. Calthorpe rubbed his thin hands together delightedly.

"He'll do, he'll do!" he chuckled, turning to Mainwaring, who had risen to go. "No more intermeddling—no more tampering—I feel it in my bones. Good-by, young man, and much obliged!"

The detective bent over the couch.

"You then feel perfectly safe now—protected?" he whispered.

"Yes, yes; perfectly so."

"Will you then accept a parting piece of advice, as an additional precaution—in fact, as a regular clincher from me?"

"Yes, yes; that is, let me hear it first."

"It is this—send for your lawyer, and alter your will with the least possible delay."

The old man seemed at first astonished, and then gave one of his comprehending chuckles.

"Alter it how?" he whispered, blinking his eyes.

"In the mention of its chief beneficiary—that is, leaving the bulk of your estate to some one other than Miss Issie, your adopted daughter—and then, let the fact be generally known."

"A good idea—a clincher, as you say. By Jove! but you're a deep one, Mainwaring! I'll do it—I'll do it, and to-morrow morning at the furthest."

"Why not now, to-day?"

Mr. Calthorpe jocosely put a skinny forefinger to his wrinkled left eye, and drew down the lower lid.

"Young man," said he, with a parting chuckle, "do you see anything particularly green in there?"

Not wholly understanding him, the detective smiled, nodded to Ichabod, and moved toward the door.

"I say, young man!" the invalid called after him, "did it ever strike you that you might have been a lady, and a Spanish lady at that, in some former state of existence?"

"No, I can't say that it ever did, Mr. Calthorpe. Does it strike you that way?"

"Decidedly."

"Why so?"

"Because of your floating walk, which one seldom sees save among the women of Spain or the Spanish Americans. It is fairly rhythmic, my boy—the melody of motion. You ought to be successful with the ladies. He, he, he!"

This was Mr. Calthorpe's farewell pleasantry.

"Surely, our invalid is improving already,"

thought Mainwaring, as he quitted the room. "Under Ichabod's nursing and guardianship, he ought to be himself again in short order."

The sick-room was on the ground floor, just off the main hallway, to the north.

Immediately in the adjoining corridor the detective was timidly approached by a wild-eyed little girl, who had evidently been awaiting his re-appearance there.

It was an ex-street Arab, known to Mainwaring as having been domesticated by Mrs. Bentincke, the housekeeper not long before.

"What is it, Clip?" he asked, in a guarded voice.

"Please, sir," whispered the child, "I tuk yer message to Miss Lois. She'll meet yer in the south-side garding, if you kin sneak your way there without bein' see'd. But, she wanted me to say—"

The remainder was frozen on her lips by the sound of an approaching step over the adjoining main hall, causing the child to disappear as if by magic.

The detective also made himself small in a convenient doorway as a commanding presence—a close-lipped, beetle-browed woman, considerably past her prime, with a bunch of keys at her girdle—swept along the passage.

Mainwaring remained for a moment, thinking hard.

"Of what other face does the housekeeper's vaguely put me in mind?" said he to himself.

"Strange! It is rather a suggestion than a resemblance, and yet I can't place it. However, it doubtless matters nothing."

He hurried with his sliding step to the main entrance, hoping to reach the south-side garden without being observed.

But, another step startled him.

He turned to confront a superbly handsome and statuesque young woman of the brunette type, slowly descending the stately staircase.

To place his hand on his heart and make a low bow of becoming humility was instinctive with the young man, as he recognized in the fair vision Miss Issie Calthorpe, the petted darling of the rich man's household.

She started at him with mingled scorn, hatred, contempt and something else (what was it, love, rage, passionate reproach, or what?), and then passed out of view as unconcernedly as if he were no more animate or noteworthy than the carved hat-rack against which he was posing.

Smiling to himself, the detective lost no more time in seeking the garden trysting-place, after first making a pretense of approaching the main gate.

As he did so a singularly-lovely young woman—as tall and statuesque as the beauty of the staircase, but a perfect blonde, and infinitely more gentle and fascinating—came out of a small summer-house to meet him.

He held out both hands, quickened his advance, his eyes sparkling, the color leaping into his face.

She tried to reprove him by her look and bearing, but in vain.

The garden seemed wholly deserted but for those loving two; the rich color came and went in her delicate cheeks; her maidenly bosom rose and fell, and there was a fluttering hesitation in her attempted dignity.

The next instant she was in his arms.

"Ah, Guy, but you are not considerate!" murmured Lois, after releasing herself from the first passionate embrace. "Why are you here? You know how offended both my father and mother would be."

He told her the object of his professional visit to her uncle.

She had never heard of the suspicion of poison, and was greatly shocked.

"Still," she presently said, returning to their own affairs, "it is wrong for us to be meeting thus, after my parents' declared opposition."

"I could not go without just one kiss, dearest," and he herewith helped himself to the twentieth! "Besides, I wanted to beg an interview at our old tryst in Mount Morris Park this evening."

"How can I grant it, after that last scene with my father and mother, at which you were present?"

"And in which," he interposed bitterly, "they peremptorily declared that I was not good enough for you, being only a poor detective—that you must perforce accept the addresses of the man you detest, that gilded do-nothing, Carolus Digby, or of no man else!"

"True," she turned away her face, "but my duty is obedience to them, so far as not meeting you again."

"You are almost of age, Lois; it is ridiculous, this treating you like a refractory school-girl! You must meet me at eight this evening. It is vital. Say that you will."

"But I warn you, Guy, it will be useless to again press me to a secret marriage with you. I am more set against that than ever."

"When it would be your sole protection, should they push you to the wall with regard to Digby?"

She sighed.

"Yes, even then. It will be useless to press me further."

"We shall see."

"What do you mean, Guy?"

"Lois, I have it all arranged, in case I can win your consent."

"What arranged? What do you mean? Guy, I shall grow angry!"

"Not till you shall have reasoned with yourself. Listen, Lois: It is our secret marriage—your safeguard against continued persecution, should it become unbearable—that I have arranged."

"Oh, Guy!"

Even his redoubled tenderness could not quiet her distress.

"Listen, Lois," he went on. "A trusted old clergyman living not far from here—a friend of my boyhood, who is about to start on an extensive journey—will tie the knot for us in secret this very night."

"Oh, Guy, don't!"

"His own wife and a devoted friend of mine (Luke Jardine, the honorable young man whom you once met in my company) will be the witnesses. I swear to you that we shall separate directly at the close of the ceremony. But, you will have the marriage-certificate in your possession. You can protect yourself with it when and where you choose, while I shall obediently await your pleasure for the assertion of my rights."

The young girl had become white.

"Guy, it cannot, it must not be!" she exclaimed, desperately.

"Think it over—bring me your deliberate answer this evening—promise me that much!"

"Don't press me, Guy. I love you, but I am strong."

"But you can bring me your answer, after reflection. Promise me that."

"I have reflected. I can and will do nothing clandestine. It is not proper."

"Some one approaches. Quick, your promise! At eight this evening—you will come?"

The moment was critical; there was a wild, an irresistible entreaty in his voice.

"Yes, yes! Let me go!"

She darted away up a shaded path, and her lover slipped into the summer-house until the threatened interruption, whatever its nature, was no longer to be feared.

Letting himself out of the garden by a little private gate in the south wall, with which he had become familiar, Mainwaring was crossing the corner of an open lot, where a number of workmen were engaged with a steam drill in removing the outcropping trap-rock, when a certain unlooked-for incident brought him to an astonished pause.

It was that of the man whom he most cordially hated of all men, the fashionable exquisite, Mr. Carolus Digby, lightly climbing out of an abandoned excavation almost directly under his feet, and extending back to the line of the garden wall.

The dandy gave him a supercilious stare, as much as to say, "What the devil are you here for?" and passed on to the street with a contemptuous shrug of his artistically padded shoulders.

For an instant the detective was mystified, but it was only and literally for an instant.

Then there was a shock, a rumbling report, and the solid rock, splintered all around the detective from underneath, rose with him into the air, amid showers of dust and stones, together with puffs of villainously smelling powder-smoke.

"What, not hurt at all, sir? But it's God's blessing that you're not dashed to pieces!"

It was a few minutes after the explosion, and such was the substance of the astonished workmen's congratulations to the detective, who, by some wonderful interposition of favoring circumstances, had alighted wholly uninjured from his sudden elevation in the air.

"Why was that excavation abandoned?" he asked, curiously.

"Because," said the foreman of the laborers, "it had accidentally been extended in under the garden yonder."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir. And there was great danger of a cave-in. In fact, it was so near the surface that the men could distinguish conversations going on in the garden overhead."

"So; and had any blasting-powder been carelessly left in the tunnel, think you?"

"No, sir; impossible! That's the mystery. It looks like its having been secreted in there but recently. What do say of it, sir?"

"Nothing at present. Thank you for your information. Good-afternoon."

And, as Mainwaring hurried away, to make his report to his chief, he felt certain that his last narrow escape, at least, was one that could not be laid directly to Old Newthe's account.

CHAPTER III.

MARRIAGE, MYSTERY AND TRAGEDY.

Soon after eight o'clock that evening, the young detective stood in a desperate mood in a secluded corner of Mount Morris Park, looking after a graceful retreating figure that was rapidly retracing its way among the shadowy trees in the direction of the adjoining 124th street.

He had thrown for a prize of love and beauty, and had lost.

The graceful retreating figure was that of his heart's idol, Lois Calthorpe.

He had used every argument, every sophistry, every tenderness; he had invoked her passionate attachment for him; he had shaken her gentle bosom with fears for her future, as a consequence of her continued rejection of his plan for a clandestine marriage; but in vain.

Duty, obedience to parental authority, conventional self-respect, had proved stronger than love, and she was gone—gone, weeping, trembling, half inclined to yield, but none the less firm to the last, and that doubtless was the end.

Mainwaring remained motionless for a moment, a prey to his gnawing defeat and mortification.

Then, as the graceful retreating figure wholly disappeared, he turned angrily upon his heel, and hurried to the room of his friend, Luke Jardine, who had been anxiously awaiting news of a different nature.

"All is over!" he exclaimed, flinging himself into a chair. "She was adamant to my entreaties—the specter of filial disobedience, the world's disapproval, was too much for her. I shouldn't wonder if they'd force her to the altar with that despicable fop, Digby, inside of a month!"

And he entered into some particulars of the interview.

Young Jardine, who was a man of sense and reflection beyond his wordly experience, listened in silence.

"It is no more than I expected," was his quiet comment at last. "Miss Calthorpe must be an exceptionally noble and prudent young lady."

"Prudent fiddlesticks! My motives were the purest—my sole object the security of the girl against foul and mercenary designs."

"Exactly—and possession of her personal liberty, at the expense of her finer, most civilized scruples!"

"Luke, you talk like a crank! But what am I to do? I'll kill that Digby on sight!"

"No, you won't. You'll just listen to me, and wait. Girls with hearts like Lois Calthorpe's don't sacrifice them on the altar of detestation, even to repay the gambling losses of a ruined father, or to gratify a weak, worldly mother's vanity."

And Mainwaring did listen to the superior wisdom of his friend, to such purpose, indeed, that in an hour or two he was in a much better, if not wholly resigned, frame of mind.

"Come, now," said Jardine, in conclusion, "let us take a parting cigar in the Park. 'Twill do you good."

This was accordingly done, Jardine in the mean time diverting his friend from his soreness by conversing of the latter's narrow escapes through the day.

They had about come to the conclusion that Mainwaring was the intended victim in either case, and that, while the deadly animus of Carolus Digby was sufficiently plain in his attempt, the similar animosity of Old Newthe was still wrapped in mystery, when the detective suddenly became aware that his companion and he had unconsciously strolled to the very spot where he had parted from Lois a couple of hours previously.

He was alluding to it to Jardine when he abruptly paused, grasping his friend's arm.

The graceful figure of his betrothed was even now approaching the spot.

"'Tis she—'tis Lois!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper. "The fates be praised! Perhaps she has reconsidered her refusal! Throw away your cigar, Luke, and stand a little apart."

The young lady, as could be easily seen by the sifting moonlight, was closely veiled and dressed just as when separating from her disconsolate lover two hours before, but, there was now something mechanically resolute, though likewise a sort of timidity in her approach.

She hurriedly placed her hand in her lover's, as he wonderingly and delightedly advanced to meet her.

"Come, Guy, come!" she murmured, in a strangely dreamy voice; "I have thought better of it, only my face must not be seen, and we must haste, haste, *haste!* We shall be privately married, as you proposed—that is, if it is not too late."

"My darling, my adored! it is never too late. The clergyman's house is but a few steps from this, and he can hardly have started on his journey as yet. God bless you for this reconsideration, my beloved! Come, Luke. This is my friend, Mr. Jardine, dearest, who is to be the witness of our marriage."

The young woman made no answer or recognition, but only clung mechanically to her lover's side, as if still somewhat dazed by the step she was taking, and the trio at once proceeded to the house of the minister, a Rev. Mr. Quackenbush, of West 126th street.

Both the clergyman and his wife were both surprised at the unseasonableness of the visit, as they were finishing the preparations for their journey, intending to take a train that night for Florida, after which they were to extend their trip indefinitely among the West India islands.

Still no objections were offered, upon the necessary explanations being made, the ceremony was speedily performed, the ring put on,

and the marriage-certificate handed to the bride, who, while persisting in keeping her veil down, had made the responses in a low and mechanical but perfectly distinct voice.

"It is very unusual, my daughter, this concealment of your face during such an important ceremony," said the old minister, as he gravely kissed her through her veil, "but it is none the less your privilege, and I wish you all happiness. God bless you both, my children."

Then Mrs. Quackenbush cordially pressed the young lady's hand, the trio returned to the street, and the marriage was an accomplished fact.

It was only in the semi-darkness of the open air that Mainwaring ventured to fold his bride to his heart, and, lifting her veil, he pressed a rapturous kiss upon her cold lips.

"That will do, Guy! No more, no more! Let me go now. I must hurry back home alone. Remember your promise. I insist that you shall not accompany me thither!"

There was the same mechanical hurriedness in her tone and manner, as she tore herself from his embrace, and sped swiftly away in the direction of the mansion-house.

The detective only shrugged his shoulders—he was too happy to be very particular just then—and, as the distance was not great, the two men contented themselves with keeping the young woman in sight until she had disappeared through the garden gate.

"Congratulate me, Luke!" then exclaimed Mainwaring, impulsively catching his friend in his arms. "It was a queer sort of marriage, with precious little festivity about it, but she is mine at last, and I am the happiest fellow alive!"

Luke Jardine returned the brotherly embrace, and uttered a few commonplace words of congratulation.

"Shall you venture to visit the Calthorpe house in the morning?" he asked, as they were about to separate.

"I shall have to, under orders, to see how our poison-dreading invalid is progressing," was the reply. "And of course I shall contrive to get a kiss from Lois, if nothing more. Good-night, old fellow. I feel as if I were treading on air!"

But, when the Gliding Detective boldly entered the Rose Hill Mansion-house soon after the breakfast hour, he was astounded, to say the least, on encountering Lois bidding a polite adieu to Carolus Digby in the hall.

She also held a newly-presented bouquet of rare flowers rather hesitatingly in her hand, but met his (Mainwaring's) reproachful-indignant look with a glance of innocent surprise.

Digby took his departure leisurely, with a glance of insolent triumph at the new-comer.

"Lois, my beloved, what does this mean?" stammered the bridegroom of the preceding night. "You accept flowers from that man?"

"I didn't wish to, Guy," was the slightly confused reply, "but he breakfasted with us, at mamma's invitation, and I did not wish to pain her by refusing his gift. What matters it, anyway, since you know that I care nothing for the conceited fellow?"

Mainwaring was still further mystified.

"Still," he faltered, "you—you accept his offering after—after what occurred last night?"

She looked at him in unaffected astonishment.

"To what do you allude, sir?" she asked, a little haughtily. "To my final rejection of your mad proposition? I thought it was sufficiently explicit."

"Lois, it is you that are mad! I do not refer to that, but to the subsequent event."

"What event?"

"The marriage services at Mr. Quackenbush's house—the ceremony, duly witnessed and certificated, that made you my wife. How can you ask?"

Her look of blank amazement gave place to a wave of indignant color springing into her lovely face.

"You have taken leave of your senses!" she exclaimed. "Or, do you mean to jest with me? It is unworthy of you."

Then she stepped back, placing her hand to her forehead, and murmuring abstractedly: "I dreamed it—I dreamed it all so vividly! How should he know of my dream, and thus try to materialize it into an actual happening?"

The young man now lost his self-control.

"It is you who are jesting!" he cried. "Or do you really mean to deny our marriage?"

"There was none to deny. Sir, you are beside yourself!"

"You have the minister's certificate in your possession."

She now looked at him with positive alarm, and just then her mother chancing to cross the main hall, came to her support.

"What! is this obscure person venturing to annoy you again, my dear?" exclaimed Mrs. Calthorpe, grandly. "Come with me to your father, who shall again be informed of this man's presumption."

As Lois was being borne away by her mother—and willingly enough, it seemed—the dazed young man had just sense enough to notice that the wedding-ring was no longer on her finger.

A low, velvety voice roused him out of his stupefaction.

"Mr. Mainwaring—Guy!"

The other Lois—the superb brunette beauty, Issie Calthorpe—was standing tremblingly before him, her proudly beautiful face covered with confused, half-guilty blushes.

"Forgive the trick," she murmured, "but I—I had loved you so long, so hopelessly!"

He could only stare at her in dumb bewilderment.

"What! not a word of forgiveness? Have I sinned beyond pardon, then?"

"Miss Calthorpe," he managed to blurt out, "what are you talking about?"

Her confusion was increased, causing her to look inexpressibly bewitching—for one who might have loved her.

"Guy, I practiced a deceit upon you," she faltered. "I—I knew of the other Lois's rejection of your proposal, and I—I personated her at the second interview, and also at the ceremony."

"WHAT!"

"Don't murder me with your contempt—don't, Guy! I—I know it was wrong—dishonorable—but I loved you so dearly!"

Mainwaring roused himself by a great effort to the demands of the unheard-of complication.

"You my wife?" he hoarsely ejaculated. "Impossible!"

"No, no; it is true, Guy. Everything aided me—my veil, the obscurity of the night, the taciturnity in which I persisted, the similarity of our names—I wonder now that the deception was successfully carried out, but it was so."

He burst into a hard laugh.

"You rave, Miss Calthorpe! This is insanity, or something worse."

"Ah, you kill me with your doubts! Am I so hideous, then, that you should so shrink from me, your bride, your wedded wife?"

"Woman, have done! The farce grows weary."

"But test me as to the truth of what I say, Guy! I can describe every incident of the ceremony, the demeanor of your best man, Mr. Jardine, the minister's words as he kissed me through my veil—everything. And look!"

She held out her hand, upon which his wedding-ring verily glistened, and also drew from her bosom the marriage-certificate.

It was too much. The young man recoiled with a great dread at heart.

Was what she asserted wholly impossible? Might not the deception have been successfully carried out, as she claimed?

The painful situation was relieved by a loud shriek from near at hand.

They rushed into the sick-room, from which it had proceeded.

One horrified servant, the giver of the alarm, was already there.

Tragedy had accompanied mystery in the Rose Hill Mansion-house!

Mr. Peregrine Calthorpe was breathing heavily, in a comatose condition, an empty laudanum bottle clutched in his shriveled hand.

Bolt upright in his chair, but with his head on his breast, sat the sick man's nurse and guardian, Ichabod Taylor, dead, stabbed to the heart by a deep dagger-thrust delivered from behind!

It seemed evident at a glance that the nurse had first been disposed of that the invalid might be poisoned with impunity, the empty vial in his hand being but a clumsy effort at disguising the truth.

Among the horrified spectators of this terrible scene, none were more demonstrative in their grief than Issie Calthorpe and Mrs. Bentincke, the housekeeper.

The emergency had served to re-establish the coolness of the detective, who at once assumed the immediate responsibilities of the occasion.

Dr. Jackman was, of course, speedily summoned as an initial measure.

He succeeded in rousing the poisoned gentleman out of his deadly lethargy, but only for a few seconds—the last flicker of the expiring candle.

But, during that brief respite Mr. Calthorpe struggled into a sitting posture, the light of intelligence reviving for an instant in his fading eyes.

"Murdered—murdered, but in vain!" he gasped. "A later will, a later will!"

Then he fell back, and all was over.

CHAPTER IV.

MOMENTOUS PERPLEXITIES.

"WHY don't you give in—acknowledge the young lady as your wife, and have done with it?"

"Because she is *not* my wife."

"The deuce! her story of the pretty deception she practiced upon you is perfectly plausible, and I, for one, believe it."

"And I, for one other, do not."

"You're growing soft, Mainwaring. You don't know when you are in everlasting good luck."

"What do you mean, Mr. Winkerton?"

"Miss Issie, your wife in spite of yourself—"

"Don't say that again, sir, if you please!"

"Well, then, the beautiful and infatuated young lady who claims you as her husband—"

"That is better."

"While the blonde Miss Lois as emphatically declares that you are not *her* husband, as *you* claim."

"True, too true!"

"She, that is, Miss Issie, is enormously rich, as her adoptive father's sole heiress, longing but for the opportunity of laying her fortune, no less than her heart, at your feet."

"Granted, as to her willingness, but not as to her ability, to do as you say."

"How?"

"She is not rich yet. The will has not been admitted to probate."

"Pshaw! A fortnight has elapsed since the double murder at Rose Hill, and there is no sign of a later will than the one that was found by Mrs. Bentincke among the old gentleman's papers."

"Still, Mr. Fieldman, his legal adviser, may have a later one in his possession."

"And Mr. Fieldman is mysteriously missing—as undiscoverably effaced as is the ministerial crank who performed your marriage ceremony—and nothing has been found among his documentary remains."

"But he may have carried a later will, together with other valuable documents, on his person."

"Not very likely, as you must admit."

"Yes, but possible."

"Oh, anything is possible!" This with contemptuous impatience. "Besides the old lawyer may be dead—like enough is dead—a case of suicide. He is known to have been melancholy and eccentric."

"Mr. Fieldman is not dead, and I shall yet find him, together with the later will. I feel it in my bones."

"The deuce, man! To feel is not to know. I believe your later will idea to be a myth."

"How do you account for Mr. Calthorpe's dying ejaculations?—'Murdered—murdered, but in vain! A later will, a later will!'"

"Dying ravings! or I don't account for them at all, whichever you please."

"Ah!" composedly; "but you can't ignore them so indifferently—no thoughtful man can."

"Perhaps not," and Mr. Winkerton knitted his brows.

It was late of a certain evening, a fortnight after the tragic events at Rose Hill, and they were conversing alone in the private office of the up-town detective agency.

"Apart from all we have been saying, Mainwaring," continued Mr. Winkerton, a little impatiently, after a troubled pause, "the case is just this: Miss Issie Calthorpe, the prospective heiress, offers ten thousand dollars reward for the discovery and arrest of her adoptive father's assassin, or assassins, she having accumulated that much money, and a little more, from Mr. Calthorpe's generous bounty during his lifetime."

"Yes, sir."

"We are interested in securing this money for the agency, ahead of the regular police detectives."

"Certainly."

"And at the same time to avenge the cold-blooded murder of our poor brother-in-arms, Ichabod Taylor."

"I should say so!"

"Well, shall we continue to intrust you in the case, irrespective of your feelings in this mysterious marriage complication, in which, as a matter of course, you alone are personally interested?"

"I hope so, Mr. Winkerton."

"Good! but you must dissemble with Miss Issie, in order to succeed."

The detective knitted his brows and then rose determinedly to his feet.

"I shall do my best."

"The inquests have left us literally nothing to go on."

"True."

"Do you still suspect Miss Issie and the housekeeper?"

"Yes; and one other, as accomplice or principal, I don't know which."

"And that other?"

"This cockney-aping fraud, Carolus Digby."

"So; but do you know that he is a fraud?"

"I partly know it. He is a gambling adventurer—a wolf in the swell society upon which he manages to foist himself."

"What is your first outside step in the case?"

"To ferret out the disreputable Grimsbys, Miss Issie's parents."

"And your next?"

"To shadow down Digby."

"Excellent! Now, how shall you get the inside track in the Rose Hill households?"

"I have already got it."

"How?"

"In two ways. First, by Miss Issie's French maid, Justine Deschappelles, who wants to be honest, and is dead in love with my *confrere*, Luke Jardine."

"Good, good! You are getting along."

"Second, through the little drudge, Clippity Clip, whom Mrs. Bentincke trusts implicitly, but who is secretly devoted to me, by reason of an old kindness."

"Still better, perhaps. Where are you off to, now?"

"In the first place, among the Fourth Ward slums, to look up the Grimsby clew. After that to Rose Hill, where Luke is secretly on guard during my absence."

"Too many irons in the fire, Guy! You should have another assistant, especially for the Grimsby trail."

"I would like another—a good one."

"I have provided him for you."

"Who is it?"

"Old Newthe!"

The Gliding Detective made a gesture of astonishment and disgust.

Mr. Winkerton was at no loss to interpret its significance.

"Nonsense, Mainwaring!" continued he. "The man is invaluable in his line, and your suspicions of his secret enmity are unreasonable."

"Are they?"

"Yes. My investigations have convinced me that he could have had no hand in your tumble into the excavation, or in throwing the vitriol."

"I hope you are right, sir."

"You accept him, then?"

"Certainly, sir; your word is law."

"But, I want you to throw over your antipathy—in other words, to give him a chance."

"Trust me for that."

The chief touched his bell.

It was answered by Old Newthe himself, as obsequious and unconcerned as ever, though he had sedulously eavesdropped from the start.

"I shall hold myself subject to Mr. Mainwaring's orders," said he, when the proposed duty had been explained to him.

Then, upon the special service being particularized, he astonished them both by exclaiming: "Old Tom Grimsby, eh? Why, I knowed 'em all—man, wife an' kid—in the old times! If they're on earth, or outside o' quod, I'll run 'em down fur ye, an'—willin', at that!"

He rubbed his hands, chuckling with a sort of ghoulish glee, as he spoke.

"What did I tell you?" cried Mr. Winkerton, clapping Mainwaring on the shoulder. "Didn't I say that our Old Newthe was your man?"

"I shall be glad of his co-operation," said the detective, blandly. "You knew Grimsby in the past, then, Newthe?"

"We was river thieves together fur five years, sir," was the quiet rejoinder. "I've been sorter wantin' to meet him again." This, with a steely glitter in the sinister eyes. "It war his false evidence, together with his wife's, what railroaded me to Sing Sing, along of robbin' a couple o' sailors, sixteen year ago!"

Then there was a sound like the filing of a cross-cut saw, which, however, was only Old Newthe gritting his teeth behind his tight-drawn lips.

Mainwaring began to warm a little toward him.

"You alluded to a child of theirs," said he.

"Yes, sir. A purty little chit of three or four. I've heerd it was sent to some charity, an' arterwards adopted by some rich gent an' his ledly."

"Exactly. But you've lost all track of the parents since their shabby treatment of you?"

"I should say so, sir, or they'd hev know'd it afore this."

And the old man's still sinewy hands twitched convulsively.

"Where shall we look for them now?"

"Among the sailors' boardin'-houses, if anywhere," was the reply, after a thoughtful pause.

"All right; I'll talk to you further."

Mainwaring and the old man lost no time in taking their departure.

"Good-luck!" the chief called after them.

"You'll not fail of it, if you only pull together."

Mainwaring consulted his watch upon reaching the street.

"Early yet," said he. "I believe I shall accompany you in your initial inquiries, Newthe."

The old fellow eyed the detective's neatly-dressed figure, and slowly shook his head.

"I'd advise you not to, sir," said he. "The sailor-slums ain't exactly invitin', specially by gas-light."

"Do you suppose I don't know them? Come along!"

Reaching the lower part of the city, they made cautious inquiries in the neighborhood of Water street and Peck Slip, and finally came to a pause before a vile den opening into an alleyway, near the latter locality.

"There was music and dancing within, and the atmosphere that came out of the open door and windows was like the blast from a distillery on fire."

"Best let me go in alone, sir," said Old Newthe. "This is wuss than all, and an old stampin'-ground of mine. It's the Sailor's Hope."

Mainwaring reflected that perhaps his companion could best pursue his inquiries alone.

"All right," he assented. "I shall remain here till you return."

Men and women of the vilest sort were reeling in and out of the doorway, over which a blue lamp was dimly burning.

In a moment or two after being left alone,

this lamp was mysteriously extinguished, and the detective found himself suddenly assaulted by five or six tough characters in the semi-darkness of the alleyway.

"He's lookin' up Tom Grimsby—he'd sell us out, too, if he had the chance!" growled one of the assailants. "Pound the head off of him! Put him full of holes!"

But they had reckoned without a correct appreciation of Guy Mainwaring, the Gliding Detective.

He seemed to flit here, there and away again, as if shod with felt, his movements were like lightning, his fists were everywhere at once, like the spokes of a flying-wheel, there was an astonishing pugilistic display of attack, parry and defense, and his blows were of the trippan-mer quality.

Still, such were the odds that the detective might have fared badly, but for a shadowy figure suddenly springing out of the den, cudgel in hand, and rushing to his rescue.

"Scoundrels! Scum of the earth! don't you know me?" hissed the new new-comer, dealing terrific blows right and left. "Have you forgotten the whip-hand of old days?"

Such of the ruffians as had not been prostrated were put to flight, and then the lamp, being suddenly relighted as mysteriously as it had been extinguished, revealed the rescuer calmly leaning on his cudgel.

It was Old Newthe.

The detective stepped across the bodies of one or two of the senseless scoundrels, to grasp the old man's hand.

"You're a good one!" said he. "If I've wronged you in the past by my suspicions, forgive me."

"That's all right, young feller. But do you think you can trust me alone in these here inquiries now?"

"Implicitly."

"Good-by, then. Where shall we meet next?"

"At the Rose Hill Mansion-house."

"Where the murderin' was did?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At midnight, or when you can."

"I'll be there, sir, mebbe with somethin' wuth reportin'. Leave me to look after these ducks."

And the old man spurned one of the forms of the now reviving ruffians contemptuously with his foot.

"Tis well. I shall trust in you."

With that, Mainwaring swiftly glided away in the direction of the nearest Elevated Railway station.

CHAPTER V.

THE HEIRESS AT HOME.

So expeditious had been the down-town explorations in which he had assisted that Mainwaring was enabled to reach the Calthorpe residence before ten o'clock.

Distinguishing two figures in the shadow of the gateway whom he recognized as Luke Jardine and Justine, Issie's waiting-maid, he gave a signal which speedily brought the former to his side.

"How goes it?" the detective inquired, in his most guarded voice.

"Promisingly."

"Has the French girl any disclosure to make?"

"She persists that she has not."

"But has she?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Will she make it?"

"In the end—yes. We are progressing."

Luke said this with a slight smile, and Mainwaring's brow grew stern.

In spite of his profession, his morality, especially with regard to women, was relentlessly correct.

"The girl seems as honest as she is comely," he said. "You would not trifle with her, Luke?"

"On the contrary, Guy, I love Justine."

"Ah, but—"

"And would gladly marry her, should she prove personally guiltless of complicity in these affairs."

"Nothing bogus there—that has the true ring, my boy. What is up in the mansion?"

"Miss Issie and Mrs. Bentincke are anxiously awaiting your reappearance, I understand. They seem to have no end of confidence in you now."

"I know that, and it is well that it should be so. What else?"

"The dude dined with Mr. and Mrs. Reuben, I understood from Clip, and he may be with them yet."

"And Miss Lois?" This in a slightly tremulous tone.

"Still melancholy, taciturn and self-secluded. She was moving about the garden a short time ago."

"That will do. Yet stay. Are any of the police detectives about?"

"Not a sign of 'em. They've either given up the case in disgust, or are piping up imaginary clews from the outside."

"That is what we want—a clear field and no

favours. Don't quit your post without seeing me again. Old Newthe may join you in the interim. I have less distrust in him than formerly, and he is now our accredited confederate. Don't stare; I will explain all later. Look sharp, Luke."

The detective entered the garden, and moved up the walk with his swift, noiseless step.

A brilliant moonlight, save for the shadows interspersed by the shrubs and trees, made it almost as light as day.

Midway to the house, he met Carolus Digby on his way out.

The adventurer was a man of thirty or thirty-five, whose powerful frame, broad shoulders and athletic carriage were in ridiculous contrast with his cockney foppishness of costume, the cut of his blonde whiskers, the parting of his hair, and the rest of it.

"Aw, I say, Mr. Mainwaring, why can't we be friends? There's no big-god nonsense about me, you know, and I like your manly earnestness in these unfortunate affairs. What do you say, you know?"

He had come to a languid pause, squinting-glass in eye, toy cane under armpit, and with his hand good-naturedly extended.

"I like an honest man," was the detective's rather evasive reply, as he quietly accepted the proffered truce.

Mr. Digby remained chatting upon indifferent topics, and then passed on his way.

Mainwaring, remembering that Lois had been seen wandering in the garden, jealously watched his retreating figure till it had passed through the gate.

"So, my fine fellow," he muttered, between his teeth, "whether you've had any secret understanding with Miss Issie, Mrs. Bentincke & Co., or not, the next time you attempt to blow me up, it will be with another explosive than blasting powder, or I'm no longer a wide-awake!"

Admitted by a servant, he was passing to an upper room where he was informed Miss Issie was awaiting him, when the little girl managed to touch his hand furtively on his way thither.

"Don't be gammoned by their fine speeches, sir," she whispered, ere flitting back into her obscurity. "They're mightily uneasy, an' don't you forget it."

He was therefore fully prepared for finding Mrs. Bentincke with Miss Issie as he entered the room.

They both arose, the former with a keen glance of inquiry from under her heavy brows, the young lady all the more lovely and interesting from a slight pallor that had come upon her of late.

Though her looks had more than once been eloquent, she had not once in speech recurred to her alleged marriage to the detective, who may be said to have been equally reticent, while keeping up a power of hard thinking, on his part.

"Have you any news for us, Mr. Mainwaring?" exclaimed Issie, with undisguised eagerness.

The young man made a negative gesture, and bowed.

"What! not a single clew to the assassin of my poor father and his unfortunate nurse?"

Mainwaring's negative sign was repeated, though a little less decidedly.

A sigh escaped the beautiful heiress, and she sunk despondingly back into the fauteuil from which she had risen.

Mrs. Bentincke—who was richly dressed, and had quietly relinquished much of her housekeeping demeanor for a more assuming mien of late—imitated her example, but more majestically.

"It is unfortunate—painfully unfortunate!" she murmured. "Must the identity of the criminal or criminals forever remain a mystery?"

"I trust not, madam—in fact, I am certain of it!"

He had taken a chair with much quietness, but accompanied the words with such a significant look that the elder woman started, and then flashed back the glance after the manner of the acceptance of a challenge.

Issie purposely misinterpreted the interchange.

"You must not think Mamma Bentincke presumptuous, Mr. Mainwaring," she gently interposed. "She has been so kind, so motherly to me that the change in our social relations has been gradually made in accordance with my express desire."

The detective had known or inferred this much before, but something caused him to restrain an involuntary start on his own part at that instant.

It was a decided, perhaps a family resemblance between the two faces before him, as he happened to see them in a certain similarity of pose and expression, such as had never struck him before.

"Is my old vague impression to be made clear at last?" he thought. "May I yet shout Eureka to my most longed-for clew?"

He assumed an air of surprise.

"It is but natural, Miss Calthorpe," said he, in his most humble manner. "Motherliness must be dear, indeed, to you in your present position."

"Thank you, sir; I find it so." And she placed her hand on the ex-housekeeper's.

"We have scarcely a clew worth mentioning at our agency," he went on, "and I understand that the police detectives have had no better success. But have you no fresh suggestion to make?"

He spoke so softly that Issie's brilliant eyes deepened.

Whatever the justice of her strange claim upon him, the genuineness of her passion was undeniable.

"None," she replied; "that is, unless my once ventured theory, in a somewhat new form, should be considered a suggestion."

"Which was, if you please—"

"That—I shudder to state it again, but it haunts me irrepressibly, Mr. Mainwaring."

"Pray proceed, Miss Calthorpe, if equal to it. Your suggestion—"

"Merely a possibility, Mr. Mainwaring."

"And that was—?"

"That poor Papa Calthorpe might, in a sudden access of insane craving for the laudanum, have killed the poor nurse in his sleep, in order to obtain the drug *ad libitum*."

She was regarding the effect of her words with scarcely disguised anxiety, as was also Mrs. Bentincke.

The detective laughed with purposed contemptuousness.

"Not to be thought of, as I said before!" was his comment. "The supposition is idiotic on the face of it."

Issie bit her lip and colored.

"But the knife belonged to Mr. Calthorpe," ventured the housekeeper, with affected timidity.

"Ay, a Malay creese, therefore used as a paper-cutter, and always in plain view on the study-table, whence it would have been most naturally used by the stealthy, entering assassin. No, no! Besides, Mr. Calthorpe had not acquired the opium habit."

"I beg to differ with you, sir. It is of my personal knowledge that he had acquired it, in secret."

"Dr. Jackman says not."

"Sick-room confidences are not always unserved, sir."

"True; but how account for the unfortunate gentleman's dying words? They were these: *'Murdered—murdered, but in vain! A later will—a later will!'*"

He repeated the words with much more intensity and significance than in Mr. Winkerton's private office.

But, though Issie averted her face with a slight shudder, genuine or otherwise, their effect was lost upon Mrs. Bentincke, whose reply was, oddly enough, almost in Mr. Winkerton's exact words.

"A dying man's ravings, like enough," said she, coldly, "or of little consideration in any event!"

The detective made a gesture that was meant to be final.

"The theory is simply untenable," said he, shortly. "You have nothing else to offer, then?" This in a gentler manner, and addressed to Issie.

She brightened again, grateful for even that.

"Not on that subject," said she. "But I have received a very flattering communication from Mr. Bullyman, my lawyer, that I would like you to see."

And she began to look among some books and other articles on a small marquetric table at her elbow.

"But that cannot concern me," observed Mainwaring, ungraciously.

She colored again, but did not look up.

"Oh, no—not directly—perhaps not. And yet he scouts the idea of there being another will—assures me that *the* will must speedily be admitted to probate without dispute—and, and—Mrs. Bentincke, what can have become of that note? Do you think—"

Here there was a crash, accompanied by a small avalanche from the table.

The detective hastened to assist in picking up the books, notwithstanding a gesture of dissent.

As he did so, a photograph album, richly bound, but not of the latest style, came open in his hand, affording him an unlooked-for revelation.

"You may have carried the note away with you, my dear," said the ex-housekeeper, with more tact than earnestness. "I shall look it up."

And she left them alone together.

Mainwaring had returned to his seat, and was curiously examining a small card-basket of exquisite workmanship, which he had retained from the miniature wreckage.

"I still can't see how the letter concerns me," he repeated, absently.

There was a sort of sob.

He started up.

Issie had thrown herself at his feet, her hands clasped, her whole appearance melting in its agonized appeal.

CHAPTER VI.

BRIDE, TEMPTRESS, OR MADWOMAN—WHICH?

"Oh, Guy—Guy, my husband! will you not forgive—will you not be good to me?"

The situation was inconceivably distressing and complicated for the young man.

His mind, even his resolution, was in a whirl, and there was the beautiful young creature—no less rich and powerful now, there could be little doubt, than superb in her burgeoning young womanhood and opulent dark beauty—literally at his feet, beseeching to be taken to his heart!

What could he say, think, or do?

Was he sure that her alleged loving treachery was a trick—that she was not, as she claimed, his bride, his wife, his Heaven-attested life-mate?

On the other hand, was it not his moral conviction that this magnificent creature was, in act or complicity, a double murderer?

No, no! how were it possible?

His eyes rested upon her supplicating loveliness.

Then a mist came over him and he trembled.

His pulses seemed to be charged with fiery currents.

Bulwarked as he was by his high sense of honor and true chivalry, he was yet human and masculine—desireful, passionate and weak.

For an instant the image of his own Lois—still idolized, though cold and scornful now—was dimmed in the mirror of his heart, and, but for the recurrence of its angel reflection, he might have caught the fascinating petitioner to his breast.

But it was only for an instant.

"Miss Calthorpe—Issie—arise! This is unseemly—unwomanly!" And in spite of her protesting tears, he gently but firmly helped her to her feet.

A tempest of loving resentment seemed to possess her.

"I am not Miss Calthorpe—I am your wife—your lawful, wedded wife, in spite of your scorn and cruelty!" she sobbed. "Oh, Guy, have mercy—pity! Listen, Guy, listen!" she captured one of his hands, and retained it in her soft clasp; "am I not beautiful enough, tempting enough, clever enough?"

"You are all that," he moodily admitted, adding in his tormented mind: "Perhaps a witch, a second Vivian, a modern Lamia, the very devil himself, for that matter!"

"But listen, Guy, listen again! I am more than beautiful, I am rich now, and you are poor. All, all is for you! In that only do I rejoice."

The words were unfortunate.

Least of all had he thought of her wealth, and the reminder of it was not agreeable.

He rudely released his hand.

"Have done, miss, or madam, whichever it may be, I beg of you!"

But she caught at the words.

"Ah!" she panted; "you acknowledge the possibility of it? My claim is no longer absolutely preposterous in your own mind? Guy, my darling, my beloved—"

He interrupted her with a half-frantic gesture.

No man hated a "scene" so much as Mainwaring, and that Mrs. Bentincke had purposely left them alone together to contrive this one did not add to his complacency.

"Miss Calthorpe—Issie—let us be sane—reasonable."

"Ah! with all my heart. But I do so love you, Guy! I cannot, will not give you up. My love is a ceaseless torrent that rushes forth to you. The love of such a girl as that other Lois is a miserable dribble in comparison, even were it for you, which it is not, she having already yielded in part to her parents' insistence regarding the suit of that scoundrel adventurer, Digby. Guy, do not render me desperate. Only look at me!"

She was the picture of emotional, pleading loveliness, the tears still misting her glorious eyes, staining her divine cheeks, her jeweled fingers extended graspingly toward him, like the talons of a bird.

He took her at her word.

He did look at her, but with folded arms, and an enforced calmness that frightened her.

"You speak of that man, Digby," said he, slowly. "You also know him, then?"

"Know him? Yes, by sight, and to despise him!"

"No more than that?"

"Surely no more, Guy."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"But well enough to treasure his picture in your album—an old picture, at that."

But the shot failed of its mark.

"Album!" she repeated, in a perfectly natural surprise. "I have no album."

He pointed to the one into which he had glanced.

"Ah, it is Mamma Bentincke's. I remember now that she brought it here to-day, though I had no curiosity to examine it. And she hastily picked up the album, running through its tablet-like leaves. "So! it is here. Then she must have known him in times past, though I would not have suspected it."

The naturalness of her manner was beyond criticism.

This was even enhanced by a mingling of woman-like exultation in her voice—her joy at the jealousy which his charge had implied.

He, in his turn, vouchsafed to examine the photo more attentively.

It was not a flattering one.

It represented its subject as a much younger and more handsome man than at present, and in a rougher, manlier dress, but with a coarser and more unpleasant expression.

The picture, one might have said, of a matured Bowery tough, in his holiday clothes, and with a distinctly criminal suggestion.

"You believe me, I suppose?" she simply asked, as the album was restored to the table.

"I do believe you."

She was resuming her passionate appeals when he checked her.

"Issie, it is not seemly," said he, sternly, but not unkindly. "It is a reversal of the more conventional order of things."

She bowed her head, her exquisitely rounded arms falling listlessly.

She was in full dress, and they were bare from the shoulder.

"It is true," she murmured, dejectedly. "It is the man, not the woman, who has the right to urge a suit." There was a dreary bitterness in her tone. "We may hunger, thirst and die for it, but we may not urge our love."

She was ravishing in her humility and sorrow.

He underwent another spasm of forgetfulness and temptation.

He was tempted to accept the credible as the inevitable, and to snatch her to his heart.

But it was a fascination of the senses, not of the soul, and it was mastered.

He gravely conducted her to a chair, and seated himself before her.

"Issie, let us be reasonable, let us be dispassionate."

She flashed up a look, then bowed submissively.

He went on:

"I cannot admit your claim, and yet I freely acknowledge that I cannot wholly deny it. Don't speak, please; let me talk for the present. My marriage was so strange, so unusual, that I must await some word from the clergyman who performed the ceremony and his wife who witnessed it. It may be long coming, for I learn that they quitted Florida almost immediately for a roving tour among the West India islands.

"But even their testimony may not illuminate my uncertainty—I acknowledge that.

"The bride's face was not seen, even her responses were so low as not to be individualized.

"There is that, and more than that, in favor of your strange claim; for even the remaining witness, my friend, Luke Jardine, declares himself unable to disprove it.

"There are many things to support the claim you make, that you successfully practiced the deception in marrying me without my knowledge. There is one thing indubitably against it."

"What is that?"

She kept her head bowed, her voice being scarcely audible.

"It is this, Issie," he answered. "It is my instinctive feeling, my absolute moral conviction, of its untruth."

She caught her breath, clasping her hands together, as if in sheer desperation.

"But what of Lois?" she moaned.

"I acknowledge to you that she remains obdurate in her denial that she figured with me in the ceremony. In fact, I seem to have so outraged her feelings that she has not spoken to me since my first attempt at claiming her as my bride. She seems to regard me as insane. So, there is also that much in favor of what you claim."

A low sob came from the lovely bowed figure.

"Oh! why is it not everything in my favor, Guy? I only claim what is the truth. Why cannot you acknowledge the inevitable?"

His voice and manner hardened.

"Because I am not convinced. But there is something else."

"What is it?"

"Admitting, for the moment, the truth of your claim, do you think it honorable, do you imagine it decent, to hold me to it?"

"Oh, Guy, I loved and love you so!"

"That has nothing to do with it. Admitting that you surreptitiously took the place of another woman—the only woman I can ever love"—(she shuddered, her hands clinching)—"at the altar—that you foisted yourself upon me by the foulest and wildest piece of deception ever heard of in the history of feminine intrigue—is it right or decent that you should persist in holding me to the treachery-welded tie? That is my question."

A sort of wail escaped her.

"Oh, Guy! don't be so hard, so relentless."

"My question, if you please."

"I loved you so!"

"Woman, my question!"

For sole answer, she raised her face, ineffable in its tear-stained loveliness.

Then, with a half-inarticulate cry, she fastened herself upon his breast.

There was no danger of Mainwaring being further fascinated—at least, not just then.

He arose, coolly disengaging himself from the straining arms, and returning her to the seat she had quitted.

"I do you the credit of believing that you are either out of your senses, or enacting a part," said he, coldly. "One reflection alone should

have deterred you in this sort of role—at least one would think so."

She had regained her sense of resentment at his unimpressibility, if not her composure.

"I plead guilty to your first charge—that my passion may have blinded me," she murmured, constrainedly. "But to what else do you refer?"

His answer was almost brutal in its abruptness.

"To your adoptive father's death, and its attendant suspicions."

Something in his tone, manner and look struck her like an electric shock.

Deadly pale, she slowly arose, as did he also.

"Good God!" she gasped: "you don't mean, you can't mean, to say that suspicion connects me with those murders?"

Her agitation was no less genuine than pitiable; but to a certain point he resolved to be merciless.

"So, you speak of both deaths as murders at last?" he sneered. "Our opium-craving theory is forgotten?"

"Perhaps so—that is—" here she broke down. "Great God! I have loved, I still worship, this man, and he rewards me by an accusation of—"

She buried her face in her hands.

He was about to say, "I have not accused you directly," but steeled his heart, and maintained silence.

She suddenly grew frightfully calm.

"Let me know the worst. Am I suspected of complicity?"

"You have gained immensely by Mr. Calthorpe's death; that is, you will have gained if—"

She interrupted him with a passionate gesture.

"My question, if you please!"

"I shan't answer you directly. But it stands to reason that suspicion should touch both the housekeeper and yourself—her even more than you—and—"

"My question, sir! Or I shall alter it somewhat now. Do you suspect me?"

His answer came so tardily as to rob it of any consolatory element.

"No, I don't," said he, doggedly. "But I wouldn't admit as much for that other one."

Pallid to ghostliness, she pointed to the door.

"Go, sir! I have wasted my love like water upon desert sands. I fear that you are not worthy of it."

But her heart went out to him wildly, even as he turned, with a cold bow, and quitted the room.

His air, his mien, so much above his station, his assured carriage, his gliding step—there was not a tittle of his personality that did not retain its clinging hold upon her soul and her imagination.

He had hardly disappeared through the half-open door before she leaped after him like a pantheress.

A tall figure—the figure of Mrs. Bentincke—glittering knife in hand, was in the act of springing after the retreating detective, with remorseless fury in her aspect.

"Woman—minion! what would you? Quick give up the weapon! How dare you?"

The words were hissed out, it was Issie who interposed, and she clutched the hostile arm and knife with fierce energy.

"Stop me not!" hoarsely whispered the other, still intent upon her purpose. "I overheard—he suspects too much—there is but one recourse. Ha!" doggedly, as the weapon was finally wrested from her hand: "have your way, then, marplot. I uppose," with a sneer, "you, would stand between him and death's silence, even at the cost of your own safety?"

"Yes, I would."

The housekeeper gave her a withering look of mingled scorn and reproach, and then swept away up the dim passage.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SOUTH-SIDE GARDEN.

As for Mainwaring, absorbed in the strange interview that had just passed, and unconscious of the danger he had escaped, he was proceeding rapidly to the gate when a faint, half-stifled cry from the south-side garden reached him.

It flashed upon him that Lois might still be "mooning" there, as Jardine had expressed it.

There was no need of a repetition of the cry to cause him to speed in its direction with his noiseless step.

The moonlight was still brilliant.

Lois was struggling in the grasp of two rufianly-looking men under the trees, in the vicinity of the little summer-house.

To flit like an avenging shadow to her rescue, fell her assailants by a couple of sledge-hammer blows, the more effective from their unexpectedness, and catch the girl's half-fainting form in his strong arms, was the work of an instant.

She clung to him affrightedly, but when they were both more composed, they observed, much to their astonishment, that the fallen men had mysteriously disappeared.

"This is very extraordinary!" exclaimed the

detective. "When were you first assailed? Where did they make their appearance from?"

She had disengaged herself from his embrace, and was standing perfectly composed now, save that there was a bright, perhaps somewhat resentful color in her fair cheeks.

"I scarcely know," was her indifferent answer. "Perhaps from the summer-house—it all happened so unexpectedly! Thank you, none the less, for your timely aid."

"Oh, don't mention it."

Then, not a little embarrassed himself, he stepped to the door of the summer-house, and looked into the comparatively dark interior, but made out that it was empty.

"There may be a secret passage," said he, with an effort. "I was told, come to think of it, of an excavation from the adjoining lot having been ignorantly extended under the garden wall. Sha'n't I see you safe back to the house? It is, perhaps, later than you imagine."

"I am aware of the hour, thank you, but I can go back alone."

Still there was a furtive desolateness in her look, and the next moment he was at her feet.

"Do you forget how you once loved me?" he blurted. "Your continued coldness breaks my heart, Lois! Let us exchange explanations—a mere breath of mutual confidence may be sufficient."

He tried to take her hand, but she would not permit.

"I must not listen to you," she faltered. "Such words to me from another woman's husband are shameful!"

He sprang once more erect.

"What! that ridiculous fiction? Issie has made even you believe it, then?"

"She is your wife."

"It is not true. But has she also informed you of the deception by which she claims to have become my wife?"

"I have learned of it."

"And you believe it?"

"I am forced to. Since it is evident that some one was married to you while personating me, her claim is scarcely to be denied."

"And you would still respect the unwomanly perpetrator of such a deception as she claims to have carried out?"

"I would not. Still she urges her overmastering love for you as her motive."

Mainwaring laughed wildly.

"That for her love!" He snapped his fingers contemptuously. "Were my love and your love nothing, that she should treacherously supplant them with her undesired passion? Listen to me calmly, Lois."

He poured forth the entire story of the strange marriage in the minutest detail.

She listened with a startled look.

"Now tell me, Lois," said he, with impressive solemnity, in conclusion, "or can you tell me that you were not the bride of that ceremony?"

"I can and do tell you so most earnestly," she replied. "And yet—"

"Go on, Lois. And yet—"

"And yet in spirit I seem to have been there at your side, I dreamed it so vividly, in every particular just as you describe it, after reaching home."

"You dreamed it?"

"Yes. Overwrought and exhausted, I threw myself on my bed without undressing, and was at once sound asleep. But I dreamed out everything, just as you have related. Indeed, so vivid, so realistic was my dream that when I awoke I could at first scarcely realize that the ring was not on my finger, the certificate in my bosom."

A light seemed to break in upon him.

"You must have been there in reality—perhaps in a species of trance—but none the less in reality," he cried. "Lois, it is you I married—you are my wife."

"This is madness!"

She recoiled in alarm, but his ardor and enthusiasm were beyond control.

"You are my wife, before God and man!" he exclaimed. "I must and will have you as such!"

"Stop, sir! Do not dare to touch me! You are Issie Calthorpe's husband; and if you follow me it will be at your peril!"

She disappeared in the direction of the house, and he stood like a statue looking into the shadows that had swallowed up her perfect form.

At that moment several men stole out of the summer-house, and suddenly hurled themselves upon him from behind.

He was overpowered before being thoroughly aware of what had happened.

"Be quick!" growled a voice that seemed slightly familiar to the detective's ears. "Into the hole with him, and then one of you signal for the old woman."

He was dragged into the summer-house, and thence down a jagged hole, which his hasty examination had not taken cognizance of in the dark, into the subterranean excavation under the garden.

Here, gagged and bound, he was kept under guard until one of the men who had been sent away came back with a lantern, and accompanied by a cloaked female figure.

The prisoner had made sure that his myste-

rious visitant would prove to be Mrs. Bentinecke.

But when his gag and the woman's veil were simultaneously removed, he uttered an exclamation of supreme amazement.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WOMAN'S FOLLY.

THE prisoner's visitant was Mrs. Reuben Calthorpe, Lois's mother.

She was a vain, frivolous and care-worn woman of middle age, and rather enjoyed the effect she had produced upon the detective.

Then she sighed, shivered, and cast a thoroughly disgusted look upon her rough-hewn and uncouth surroundings, the men—all of whom were masked—remaining in the mean time somewhat in the background in perfect silence.

They were powerful, athletic fellows, eight in number.

"So, Mr. Detective," said the lady at last, in a weak and shrill, but what was meant to be a very impressive voice, "I suppose you are at a loss to know why I have procured your capture in this ignominious fashion."

Much to her dissatisfaction, the detective burst into an amused and hearty laugh, which, but for his bonds, would have been of the side-splitting variety.

"Your ladyship mistakes," he managed to say, with mock seriousness. "No mystery in mine, if you please. Your ladyship's governing motive in this little civility is as plain as—as the pretty little youthful nose on your damask face. Shall I tell your ladyship what it is?"

She glared at him, and then smiled assentingly.

"Well, your ladyship has argued with yourself something after this fashion: All that detective's professional work about the mansion-house here is hypocritical pretense. He is still intent on carrying off my daughter, notwithstanding that he is already married to Issie Calthorpe, and for all that he knows we have reserved her hand for the rich and high-placed Mr. Carolus Digby. How do I know all this? Because Mrs. Bentinecke tells me so, and Mrs. Bentinecke is a wise and worthy woman. Ergo, our daughter is in danger, and Mr. Detective must be squelched in short order. I must hire some needy and unscrupulous ruffians to carry the impudent fellow off. A few days of enforced seclusion, or perhaps maltreatment, will doubtless cool his blood and make him tremble at my secret power. Am I not right so far, your ladyship?"

Mrs. Calthorpe was coloring through her rouge in a decidedly corroborative way.

"Ah, I see. We will proceed. The good Mrs. Bentinecke examines and approves your ladyship's Machiavellian plan, and it is adopted. Her bravo's are hired and posted. The ambushade is in readiness. But detectives are proverbially wide-awake. How to allure him into the toils. Our daughter herself shall be made the unconscious instrument. Her habit of wandering in the south-side garden until late is to be utilized. The detective is expected at the mansion-house. His exit, duly signaled, is the signal also for a sham seizure of the young lady from the summer-house. But one cry is allowed to escape her, and it is enough. He naturally rushes to her rescue, and at last, just as naturally into the toils. The young lady knows nothing of it, but what would you? *Voilà!* as the Frenchmen say. The snake is scotched, the detective helpless, your ladyship avenged. How is that?"

Mrs. Calthorpe surveyed him with starting eyes.

"Are you a man-witch, or the devil?" she exclaimed. "However, carry him away, you men. My darling daughter must be protected at any cost."

But, unfortunately for the detective's captors, they forgot to gag him afresh, and, as they were carrying him out through the tunnel's opening upon the vacant lot, he suddenly sounded a shrill whistle with his pursed lips that would have discounted a first-class locomotive in distress.

Their leader uttered a curse, and began to replace the gag, but it was too late.

Instantly the party were furiously attacked by two men, armed with stout sticks, who seemed to spring from nowhere in particular, and before they could recover from their surprise their released captive was also on his feet, bringing his electric pugilism into full play.

The ruffians were speedily routed, most of them with sore heads, the lady having effected her disappearance, with a little screech, at the outset of the affray.

"How is it with you, Guy?" anxiously exclaimed Jardine, who had led the rescue.

"Oh, I'm all right!" said Mainwaring.

And he fell into a fresh fit of laughter, while Old Newthe, who had ably seconded the rescue, seemed to regard him with fatherly solicitude.

They were still amid the confines of the outer excavation, and lost no time in getting upon higher ground, when the detective related the particulars of his adventure.

"The old lady must be a fool," commented Jardine.

"She is all of that, my boy—in her way."

"What do you suppose she meant to have those chaps do with you?"

"The Lord only knows, and he won't tell. Perhaps, to shut me up in a dark room, like a naughty boy, till I should promise more circumspection in my visits hereabouts. Have you anything further to offer?"

"Not yet. It is very late, but I had just separated from the little Justine and been joined by Old Newthe here, when your signal sounded."

The Gliding Detective grasped the old man by the hand.

"You're a trump card, Mr. Newthe," said he, heartily, "and I'm once more in your debt."

"No you ain't sir," was the gruff response. "I'm in yours, for there's nothing I relish more than a ding-dong argument on occasion, and I ain't no Irishman, nuther."

"What have you to report?"

"I've found your man, sir."

"What! the original Grimsby?"

"True for you, sir."

"Explain, if you please."

"He's keepin' a sailor's boardin'-house, not far from the den where we had the fust scrimmage."

"Excellent! And you made yourself known to him?"

"Yes; an' thinks we're as good friends as ever. Ha, ha, ha!" the old man gave a fiendish chuckle, his hand tightening on his heavy stick. "Well, let him keep on thinkin' so, at least for the present."

A momentary suspicion of Old Newthe's sincerity crossed the detective's mind.

"You are Grimsby's enemy?"

"Ay, sir; to the death—though he don't suspect it."

"But how happens it you have not looked up his whereabouts ere this?"

"Because, sir, up to a fortnight ago his whereabouts was nowhere."

"How?"

"He's recently come back from abroad, an' bought out the Mariner's Rest, as his crib is called."

"Oho! And Mrs. Grimsby? What of her?"

"Old Tom purtends to know nothin' about the old woman, or about the young 'un, either, fur that matter."

"So. And they most likely intend he shall remain in ignorance," said the detective, half to himself. "But that is to be seen."

Both Jardine and Old Newthe looked at him in surprise.

"Might we be so bold, sir," ventured the old man, a little timidly, "fur to ax you what you mean?"

"I suppose so," replied Mainwaring, thoughtfully, "for it will be an open affair before long—it can't help being, I think."

"I understand now, though I had partly forgotten," said Jardine. "Miss Issie, the Calthorpe heiress, is old Grimsby's daughter."

"Add that Mrs. Bentinecke, the housekeeper, is her mother and old Grimsby's wife, and you've got the thing better."

Both his hearers manifested no little surprise at this information, which, as the reader must have seen, had but recently been hit upon by Mainwaring himself.

"The next thing to make sure of," said the latter, after a pause, "is whether old Grimsby is really ignorant of their present circumstances or whether they have all been acting in concert from the outset."

"Yes," observed Jardine. "Our clew to the double-assassin may lie in the determination of that very question."

"I thought, sir," said Old Newthe, "as how you'd want to size up old Tom on your own account."

"So I shall, as a matter of course, was Mainwaring's reply.

"Aha! I know'd it. I've ranged fur you to meet him to-morrer night, sir."

"Good! How did you manage it, without exciting his suspicions?"

"Told him he might get wind of Cracksman Charley through you."

"Who is Cracksman Charley?"

"Old Tom's son by his first wife, sir; an' consequently the young leddy's half-brother, 'cordin' to what you say."

The Gliding Detective indulged in a brief but troubled reverie.

He believed that Issie had wronged him deeply, perhaps irretrievably, and she might even be criminal; but, recalling the girl's magnificent beauty and intellectual cleverness, it was not without compunctions that he would see her connected with vulgar wretches and base associations.

"All right," said he, at last. "You shall instruct me further in the role to be carried out, Mr. Newthe. We must now obtain sleep and rest, if we are to be good for anything in the future."

The trio accordingly separated.

CHAPTER IX.

THE RAILROAD CUT.

THE detective's way led him eastward, and a town clock struck two in the morning, as he thoughtfully set foot on the 124th street bridge

across the deep Fourth Avenue Railroad cut, with which the residents of Harlem are so familiar.

He was still absorbed with a sentiment of pity for the exposure he necessarily had in view, for the beautiful heiress of the great Calthorpe estate, as she considered herself, when another thought struck him yet more forcibly.

What if her story were true, and she were really his wife?

Would not the ruthless dashing her down to the base level from which she had had her rise, be doubly ignoble and cowardly then, as proceeding from his act?

Even if she should prove unworthy—perhaps criminal—would it not be the man's part to rather stand by her, under those circumstances, instead of forcing her down, down, as he contemplated?

His thoughts were in a whirl, but only for an instant.

He was rudely aroused from his reverie, first by the piercing whistle of an approaching train, and then by a sharp blow that sent him staggering along the bridge.

Two men had suddenly sprung upon him from behind an abutment.

A second blow felled him before he could recover from the first.

"Hurry up!" hoarsely muttered one of the scoundrels. "Time's short!"

In another moment the detective's pockets were turned inside out, and he was tossed over the rail, directly in the path of the on-coming train.

The last blow had only partially stunned him, and his fall had been somewhat broken by his clothing catching on a projection in the descent.

But, nevertheless, his body lay directly across the rails, the walls of the cut rising perpendicularly on either side.

"He'll do now!" exclaimed a voice, from the bridge. "The wheels will grind him up in another minute, and his—detective work will give the ladies at the big house no further trouble. Come along!"

Then there was a scampering of flying feet, and silence reigned, save for the increasing roar and rumble of the coming train.

The detective had heard as one in a nightmare.

He was on the down track, and he could see the headlight of the monster that was thundering down upon him from the north.

He made a desperate effort to roll to one side, but was incapable of movement.

He tried to call for help, but the words seemed to die in his throat.

On thundered the train!

It had crossed the river bridge, it was already in the cut, in another minute he would be ground to pieces, or mangled beyond recognition.

He strove to close his eyes, to shut out the advancing specter, to await the shock in darkness, but even that was denied him.

His eyes remained staring, he was fascinated by the horror of it.

There was a last piercing whistle.

It was like a demoniac chorus, the quintessence of all the aggregated screams of hell in one inconceivable screech.

The headlight was now like a blazing mountain of stupendous brilliancy.

The train was upon him.

But at the critical instant he was torn out of its path by a powerful hand, the monster thundered by, bereft of its prey, and he was saved.

Who had so opportunely snatched him from destruction?

He felt his strength returning, felt even that he had not been seriously injured by his tumble from the bridge, but he was still in his unknown preserver's grasp, and was being borne up some rude steps in the side of the cut as if he were no more in that mighty grasp than a man of straw.

But the mystery was soon over.

No sooner had they emerged into the moonlight of the upper air than he was placed on his feet with an exclamation of astonishment.

"Heavens! it's Mr. Mainwaring, or I'm a duffer, you know."

The detective was no less amazed.

His preserver stood revealed in the person of his would-be rival, Mr. Carolus Digby.

"You must be as strong as an ox!" was all Mainwaring could say at first.

Carolus shrugged his powerful shoulders, and then his splendid frame, seeming so out of place in the ultra-dudishness of its London costuming, shook with his hearty laugh.

"I don't brag much on my muscle, you know," said he. "But, to tell the truth, I am yet to see the man that I am afraid of. Are you hurt much?"

"Nothing to speak of, or I'm mistaken." And the detective shook himself, after which he began brushing himself off, adding: "I have to thank you, sir, for saving my life. I never dreamed," this a little bitterly, "that you would place me under such an obligation."

"No obligation at all—not worth mentioning, you know. I saw you chucked over the rail, and the ruffians made tracks as I hurried up to

the rescue. Obligation be blowed! Hope you'll be all right to-morrow. Good-night, Mr. Mainwaring."

But the detective had placed his hand on his arm.

"Hold on!" said he. "I can't understand you, Mr. Digby."

The other was not so surprised as might have been expected.

"Why not?" he asked.

"Can't you guess why I am somewhat mystified concerning you?"

"Perhaps so, my boy; but you've a tongue of your own, you know."

"Well, then, you've just saved my life, at the risk of your own, and yet I am sure you headed that masked gang, under foolish Mrs. Calthorpe's orders, that dragged me into the hole under the summer-house, an hour ago."

Carolus hesitated, as if about to deny the charge, and then, with an off-hand gesture, burst afresh into his hearty laugh.

"I acknowledge the corn," he admitted. "But the devil, man, what would you? It was a pet scheme with the dear lady, and, as I'm still off color with the daughter, I had to please the mamma, you know. Besides, I was pretty sure that no real harm was intended you. Shake!"

He extended his open hand so engagingly that Mainwaring could not choose but accept it, though he did so with some mental reservation.

"You're an odd fellow," said he. "You must have deserted your *confreres* early, or my friends would scarcely have effected my deliverance so easily."

"Faith, you may say that, my boy. Ha, ha, ha! I had my hands full with the old lady, who went off into a first-class, bang-up faint at the outset, you know."

"Your companions—"

"Were merely rough working men, at a dollar a head, and won over by the novelty and romance of the thing. Now don't let that keep sticking in your crop, my boy. Good-night, once more! And, Lois or no Lois, I hope we may be hunky friends in the future, you know."

And he airily took himself off, this time without hindrance, and taking a westerly direction.

The detective had been robbed of his watch and a small amount of money, all he had upon his person, by the ruffians on the bridge.

But this did not trouble him half so much as the mystery of the affair, for he felt morally certain that robbery had only been a secondary object of the attack, while there were also strange contradictions in the character so unexpectedly developed by Carolus Digby, and he was full of pondering reflections on his way to his own lodgings.

It was so late on the following day when Mainwaring had finished certain routine duties at the agency, besides making his report to Mr. Winkerton, that it was then nearly time to think of his trip with Old Newthe among the slums of the Fourth Ward.

"Come and take supper at my restaurant with me, Mr. Newthe," said he, "and we'll talk over the business of the evening before setting out upon it."

"With all my heart, sir," said the old man, gratefully. "And I may have something to say to you on another subject of interest."

"You're making quite a team of it," Mr. Winkerton called out to them, as they were quitting the offices. "But be careful!"

He accompanied the words by a smiling wink at the Gliding Detective, as much as to say: "Here's consistency for you! What has become of our inveterate distrust of old Newthe?"

The detective philosophically accepted the chaffing without reply.

"What were you intending speaking about, Mr. Newthe?" he asked, when they had begun to discuss their repast.

"That 'ere last adventure of yours, sir, an' the odd way you was snapped out of it by that howlin' swell, Digby."

"It was odd, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir; and I thought you might want to know all about the cuss."

"We must know more about him when we have more time."

"I know everything already."

"You?"

"From A to Gizzard, as the schoolboys say."

"You surprise me. How was that?"

Mr. Newthe coughed a little apologetically.

"I sometimes do a little shadowin' fur private parties," said he, "thout the boss bein' any the wiser."

"I'll keep your secret. Well?"

"Some time ago I was hired on the sly by a certain gent to foller up Mr. Digby."

"Who hired you?"

"Mr. Reuben Calthorpe."

"Oho! I begin to understand. Birds of a feather, eh?"

"Jess so, sir. Both on 'em gamblers, an' the old 'un tryin' to make sure of the young 'un's solid resources, in his darter's interest. That's it in a nutshell."

"I understand." A little shortly. "Well, what did you find out about Digby?"

"Thet he's a howlin' swell on mighty small

capital—without a dollar but what he fakes at faro, poker and roulette."

"But I have suspected this much before."

"Mr. Calthorpe knows it now, but he still doesn't object to the swell fur a son-in-law."

"That is mysterious, certainly."

"Ain't it?"

"And yet Mr. Calthorpe has the instincts and breeding of a gentleman. Why doesn't he object?"

"Fur two reasons."

"And those are—?"

"Fur'st, because he owes Digby two thousand dollars, borrowed money."

"So!"

"Next, Digby holds, in part payment of debt, a check for half the amount, given him by Mr. Reuben Calthorpe."

"What of that?"

Old Newthe chuckled.

"The signature to the check is not Mr. Reuben's, but Mr. Peregrine Calthorpe's, and it's a forgery."

The detective was astonished.

"This is, indeed, worth knowing, Newthe!" he exclaimed. "It sufficiently explains Digby's rascally power over poor Miss Lois's ex-gambling father."

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Reuben Calthorpe must be rescued from the scoundrel's clutches, if merely for his daughter's sake."

"Yes, sir. I was sure you would say so, sir."

CHAPTER X.

AMONG THE SLUMS.

At this juncture they were joined by Luke Jardine.

He came by appointment, with his report as to affairs at Rose Hill, chiefly obtained through the observation of Justine Deschappelles.

"Something unusual is in the wind at the great house. Miss Lois and Miss Issie have had their heads together the better part of the day—a sufficiently unusual circumstance in itself. They have also been looking over their boating costumes in each other's company. Even Justine did not as yet know what it all meant; but she was bent on finding out at the earliest possible moment."

Such was the substance of the young man's report.

Mainwaring reflected.

He knew that there had been a close intimacy between the young women in earlier days, during which they had boated considerably together in the vicinity of the Calthorpe country mansion on the Hudson, and acquired no little skill in the pastime.

But that was all, and he could not for his life hit upon the significance of this renewal of the intimacy, as reported by his coadjutor.

He consulted his watch—a substitute for the one of which he had been robbed, for he had several cheap ones at his lodgings.

"Eight o'clock," said he. "Newthe and I must be going. The best thing you can do, Luke, is to return to your post, and govern yourself according to circumstances. If all goes well, we shall rejoin you between now and midnight."

The detective and Old Newthe lost no more time in setting out for down-town.

About to disembark from the Elevated train at Franklin Square station, a big man, his countenance concealed by a slouched hat, blocked the way until the last moment, so much so that Mainwaring ventured to remonstrate, after barely having made his exit from the moving car at the extreme end of the station platform.

The response was an unexpected blow in the chest that sent him flying overboard.

Old Newthe, who had already alighted, uttered an exclamation of horror, and made a rush toward the perpetrator of the outrage, but the latter had been carried on.

He then looked frantically into the abyss, calling loudly upon the detective's name, though hardly doubting that he had been dashed to pieces on the stones below, the station platform being at that point fully sixty feet above the street.

"I'm all right," sung out the well-known voice from below, "though it isn't that rascal's fault that I'm telling you of it. Wait for me in the street."

Mainwaring was then distinguished hanging with one arm over a telephone wire, upon which he had providentially caught in his headlong descent, and the old man lost no time in hurrying down to the street.

By dexterously working himself along the wire, and thence down a telegraph pole, the detective was soon standing at his side.

He was somewhat breathless, but unscathed.

"Did you catch a glimpse of the villain's face?" he asked.

"I did, sir," was the response.

"Whose was it?"

"Mr. Carolus Digby's."

Mainwaring was mystified.

"Are you sure?"

"I'd swear to it."

"But why should he, of all men, try to take my life to-night, after risking his own to save it last night?"

"It's a puzzle, sir. Perhaps last night he saved you unintentionally, taking you for a stranger."

"Perhaps so. We shall see. At all events, his attempt of to-night lessens the obligation I was under to him."

"Ha! Consider it wiped out, sir."

"We shall see."

They resumed their quest.

It was only when the detective stood with his conductor before the vile-looking, vice-suggesting sailors' haunt near the river front, where he expected to meet the disreputable progenitor of Issie Calthorpe, that he began to seriously think over what he would have to say to him.

True, the debasing family connection might have been kept up from the first, and in that way have an important bearing on the tragedies at Rose Hill.

But how did he know that? And, apart from it, what business of his was the mere maintenance of such relationships, howsoever undesirable from a general point of view.

He was somewhat relieved of his embarrassment by his companion.

They had traversed the wretched tap-room, pushed their way among its whisky-soaked or sinister frequenters, and were confronting the landlord in his little private den opening upon an offensive alleyway at the rear.

"Tom, old boy, this is my young missionary friend, Mr. Mainwaring, as I was a-tellin' you of."

Such was Old Newthe's tactful introduction of our detective.

The latter took up the cue at once, assuming a grave, ministerial air, and bowing sanctimoniously.

"A fresh parson, eh?" sneered the landlord of the Mariner's Rest, but rather good-naturedly withal. "You're welcome, though—everybody, black, blue an' white, is welcome to old Tom Grimsby, who ain't afeard of no man. What shall it be, your riverance? An' ye kin go on with your catechisin' arter you've wet your tootin'-pipe."

Mainwaring made a negative gesture, and seated himself at the little table, laden with glasses and greasy playing cards, at which the old man was receiving his visitors, with a filthy open account book before him.

"It is outside of my calling to partake of your invitation, Mr. Grimsby," said the detective, sanctimoniously. "But it would please me if you and my good friend here would deign to drink something harmless at my expense."

"Ha, ha, ha!" The landlord of the Mariner's Rest shook with laughter, while reaching for a black bottle, and filling two glasses, one of which he shoved toward Old Newthe, who had also seated himself. "Harmless is good, harmless is! It's the best of bug-juice, though, an' your offerin' to pay for it is a new wrinkle fur a visitin' missionary. Here's to all the hair off the top of your head, sir, an' never say die!"

He was a grossly fat, greasy old ruffian, with a heavy hand and a crime-written face.

Mainwaring found it difficult to associate him with Issie's or even Mrs. Bentincke's past family history, but was none the less resolved to make the most of the opportunity.

"Thank you, sir," said he, assuming a smiling—but uneasy air. "I don't object to drinking, if not carried to excess."

"Haugh! But that's better than what some on you preach."

"I mean it, my dear sir, indeed I do. If your vocation is spiritual and mine spiritual, that is no reason why we should quarrel."

The landlord's mood seemed to suddenly change.

He brought his heavy hand down on the table in a manner that made the glasses jump.

"I should say not!" he growled. "But what are you arter, anyway, young feller? I kin answer all your fool inquiries in advance."

"Not quite all, I'm afraid."

"Yes, I kin. There's no women on my premises, thievin' ain't allowed, men are treated like men—that is, they ain't given no liquor arter they're blind drunk—an' there ain't never no shanghai-in' allowed. There you are."

"I'm glad to know that you keep such a scrupulously virtuous place, Mr. Grimsby."

"That be blowed! What are you here fur? That's what I want to know."

"Easy, Tom, easy!" interposed Newthe. "The gent's a friend of mine, an' consekently under my purtection. Remember that."

"Remember nothin'!" cried the other, with an oath. "What's he arter?"

"To get some information of you. I told you that last night. Have you been drunk ever since?"

Without answering, the man fixed his sinister eyes upon Mainwaring with suspicious scrutiny. "Information, eh?" he growled, something like fear coming into his swollen and brutal face.

"Yes."

"Information 'bout what, Jack?—Not about the old days an' doin's?"

"No, no!" continued Newthe, impatiently.

"Information of your daughter what was put into a Institoot, you know. My friend got interested in her there, and would like to know what became of her."

The landlord gave a start.

Then he fixed his eyes yet more suspiciously on the detective.

"Are you sure," said he, half-menacingly, "that you was interested in my daughter, little Nance, while she was at the Institoot?"

The detective supported the fabrication, but unwillingly.

"Yes."

"Good enough! What Institoot was it?"

Mainwaring was naturally nonplused, but Newthe came promptly again to his support.

"Oh, you're a fool, Tom!" he exclaimed, with pretended anger. "Jess as if there was more'n one Shelterin' Arms Institoot of the Children's Aid Society! You make me tired."

Here there were indications of a fight in the adjoining tap-room, and the landlord hurried away to nip it in the bud, with his arms bared to the elbow and blood in his eye.

As he turned his back Old Newthe looked after him with an expression of concentrated animosity.

"You keep up the Institoot dodge," he whispered to the detective, "an I'll gradually lead up to the subject of them murders." His hands clinched. "Oh, how I would like—"

He was cut short by the landlord's unceremonious return.

There had ensued the sound of heavy blows, the thud of a falling body, the crash of a splintering chair, a wrangle of oaths and epithets, and sweet peace had once more spread her halcyon wings over the Mariner's Rest.

The landlord seemed to be in an improved humor, fighting being perhaps his customary self-quieting draught.

"So you was a sayin' as how you knowed my little Nance at the Institoot?" said he, resuming his seat.

Mainwaring nodded.

"Well, young man, I wish you could tell me what's become of her—I allers had a sneakin' sort o' weakness fur my little Nance."

"But that is what I hoped to find out from you, sir. A lovely, a fascinating child, sir!"

The landlord's evil temper returned.

"How should I know?" he burst out, savagely. "Her infernal witch of a mother shoved her into the Institoot when I was laid by the heels, along of some river-piratin', curse her! What d'ye come to me fur? When I got on my legs ag'in the gal had been dropped out, an' no one would put me on the track of her. But wouldn't I give my left hand to lay hold of her now? Mebbe she's growed up handsome, an' she might tend bar for me here." Mainwaring gave an inner shudder. "What d'ye mean by your nonsense, I say?"

The detective was about to answer, when he was signed to silence by Old Newthe.

"Hold your horses, Tom Grimsby, or you an' I'll quarrel," said the latter, with sudden fierceness. "I'm not goin' to hev my friend here scared out of his boots afore he's had a chance to say his soul is his own. You hear me!"

"But curse it all, Jack—"

"Avast, I tell you. Let me do the chinnin' a bit."

The landlord acquiesced, after throwing an odd glance at him, and then began refilling the glasses.

"Cut away, Jack," said he. "And here's to you!"

Newthe also drank.

"My young friend's object is jess this, Tom," and he fixed his eyes piercingly on the landlord. "He wants to find out the where'bout of your wife an' daughter along of a perticular purpose."

"What purpose is that, Jack?"

"Along o' the gentleman what 'dopt the gal, an' what was recingtly found murdered in his bed, Tom Grimsby!"

The landlord turned white through his purpled complexion, and the look of fear returned to his eyes, but only to give instant place to a cold, pitiless hardness there.

"So that's your game, is it, Jack Newthe?" said he. "The old score is burnin' in your crop, an' you're wantin' to git even on me in this way!"

"What do you mean?" cried Newthe, with a blank look.

The landlord paid no further attention to him, but turned to the detective, almost thrusting his face under his nose.

"How are you, Mr. Parson?" he hissed out, in a strangely bitter voice.

"I am well, thank you."

"How are you, Mr. Guy Mainwaring, the famous Gliding Detective of old Winkerton's spies and cut-throats?"

And, before the detective could recover from his surprise, the ponderous landlord of the Mariner's Rest had overturned the table, and hurled himself upon him like an avalanche.

Old Newthe sprang fearlessly to his feet with an oath, but was, to all appearances, as summarily knocked down by a blow from behind, and the room at once filled with ruffians.

"Get out the boat, and be cautious," said the

landlord, kneeling on the detective's chest. "This spy must be taught a lesson. Then tell my wife it's all right."

CHAPTER XI.

GAGGED AND BOUND.

ONCE more gagged and bound, the detective was presently carried through the alley-way, across South street, and lowered into a large yawl, that lay rocking on the water, part-way under one of the piers.

The weather had turned to threatening, with but occasional glimpses of stars and the adjacent water-front was comparatively deserted.

A cloaked female figure was already seated in the stern of the boat, as if in expectancy.

The fat landlord descended into it, followed by the muffled figure of a man, of silent and mysterious aspect.

These in their turn were followed by four stout oarsmen, who deftly slipped into their places, and grasped the sculls.

Then the boat was released from her fastenings, and her head turned outward.

The woman managed the tiller ropes admirably, the oar-blades bit into the sullen water, the bows of a couple of brigs that were lying end-on in the dock were avoided by a close shave, and the yawl shot out into mid-stream.

"Keep her well up," said the landlord, in a low but authoritative voice. "We'll have the flood-tide with us in less than ten minutes."

Even without overhearing this, Mainwaring would have guessed by the passing shore and ferry lights that they were heading up East River.

He doubted not that the landlord had seen through his pretended character from the very outset, and was now bent upon revenge, probably to the extent of murdering him, the better to secure his own safety.

For was not the detective now justified in believing that he was in the power of the man who had murdered Peregrine Calthorpe and Ichabod Taylor, most likely with the connivance, or actual assistance, of his wife and daughter, Mrs. Bentincke and Issie?

At all events, he thought he was, and, helpless and speechless, he could only lie there in the boat, and await whatever doom was being designed for him.

Strange to say, even under these desperate circumstances, one of his most frequent side-reflections was one of pity for his late companion—"poor, faithful Old Newthe!" as he thought of him—who he did not doubt had been murdered in his defense.

As the upper and less frequented waters of the estuary were reached, the wild and reckless spirits of the landlord seemed to rise and beat their wings, as a fresh-freed vulture might have done.

"It's like the old bold days over again," he exclaimed, with a nudge of the woman's knee. "Eh, old girl?"

She nodded in seeming good-humored sympathy, but without replying.

"Oh, it's joy—it's like brandy to a half-dead stomach!" cried the old ruffian, gayly. "What would I not give for a whiff of the brave old river-piratin' days again? But I'm old, old now—old and stiff from the jail-sores and the years. Pass it around, boys!"

And he produced a bottle at which all his companions took a pull with a gusto, excepting the woman and the muffled figure at her side.

Then he began indicating the scenes of his past nefarious exploits that they were passing.

"See! there is where we did up the skipper and crew of the Norwegian oil-ship. Lord! how the Dutchmen squawked as we knocked 'em on the head. And we got away, without the blasted cops snuffing a hair of us. And yonder, under the Ravenswood shore, was where we looted the big East Indiaman, but not without Jerry Stanwix going under, and I've one of their cursed bullets in my legs to this day. Pull away, lads! now we feel the flood. But hold on!" and he turned again to the woman. "Why not one of these rocks, as well as another? They'll be flooded under in two hours."

She shook her head, muttering something about the spot not being secluded enough.

The landlord acquiesced with a laugh, and went on with his cold-blooded reminiscences of midnight crime, while the yawl, tirelessly pulled and now well in the flood tide's embrace, shot swiftly along the east side of Blackwell's Island, whose half-submerged outlying reefs had called forth the mysterious suggestion.

Presently the woman signed the landlord to silence.

"Try him now," she said in a voice that was evidently disguised.

The ex-river-pirate nodded.

Then he relieved the prisoner of his gag, partly propped him up against a small cask; and poured a few drops of spirits and water between his lips.

"Hi, there, you cussed spy! Can you speak?" he asked.

The detective clacked his dry tongue against the roof of his mouth, which felt as if it had been baked, and moved his lips.

"A little," he managed to say in reply.

"Well, a little is all we're wantin' at present, and deuced little, too!"

Here the woman relinquished the tiller-ropes to her silent companion, and edged nearer to the captive.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked, but without removing her veil.

The detective feebly shook his head.

"Do you know now?" and she had raised her veil.

He glared at her.

"Mrs. Bentincke!" he exclaimed faintly. "But I might have guessed as much."

"Why?"

She was gloating over him with such venomousness as he had not dreamed a woman's face to be capable of.

"You ought to know," he answered.

"Spy! scorpion! noiseless-footed sleuth-bound! Yes, I do know why, and I will tell you."

She spoke so low as scarcely to be heard by any one but him, and yet with a vibrant intensity of hatred and malignity that chilled him to the marrow, fearless as he was.

"You are my daughter's husband," she went on, more collectedly, but with no lessening of her venom. "Had you been content to accept the love and fortune that idiot of a girl was, and is still, so eager to squander upon you, all would have been well, and even I would have endured you, though I have hated you from the first—almost feared you. But no; apart from your refusal of her glorious bounty, you must needs haunt and pursue me with your infernal suspicions. Wretch, for that you shall die to-night. Even Issie herself should not save you, were she here. I would achieve my security—I would have your life, if I had to wade through her blood to take it. Now you know more than you did before. Confess it."

The concentrated malice of her words had rushed with but little sound, in deadly noiselessness from her quivering lips.

As her listener vouchsafed no reply, she went on:

"But fear not; your curiosity shall be measurably satisfied. You shall carry with you across the threshold of the doom I have prepared for you something of the secret intelligence for which you have so madly longed. Yes, I, Mrs. Bentincke, was in former days Dolly Grimsby, the river-pirate's wife; this man" (indicating the landlord) "was my gentle, my conscientious husband; and the superb Issie was our child."

She paused again, but he still attempted no answer.

"Hal! you suspected this much before, you might say," she went on, with a wild smile. "But I would have you know it indubitably before you die. I am willing for you to carry a yet dearer secret to the grave. Listen!"

Her face was almost touching his, and he could just catch her closing words, though her baleful breath was hot upon his cheeks and eyes.

"Listen! Guy Mainwaring, mine was the brain that contrived, though not mine the hand that wrought, old Calthorpe's death and that of the man-nurse who might otherwise have protected him! Listen yet further. There was a later will, and I found and burned it."

He could only look at her, half-stupefied with horror.

She coolly replaced her veil, resumed the tiller-ropes, and sunk back into her former seat.

"Give way! give way!" she called out, in her accustomed clear and resolute voice. "We must reach the rock before the tide half-covers it. Give way, I tell you!"

They were now rushing up with the tide at a furious pace, and presently came to a pause near one of the partly-submerged rocks running out southwardly from Gibson's Island, and on the edge of Hell Gate.

After being regagged, the helpless detective was summarily fastened on his back to this rock, with the rising water washing over his lower extremities.

"Good-by, Mr. Mainwaring!" called out the woman's hateful voice, in mock sympathy. "We are not bloody-minded or vindictive, as you see. We do not kill you, we do not stain our hands with your treacherous blood. We merely leave you severely alone. We also wish you joy of the precious secrets you have obtained."

The wretched captive heard the swash of the waves against the turning prow, then the splash of the oars, growing fainter and fainter.

Then he knew himself to be helpless, abandoned, doomed.

He was in a half-sitting position, and by a great effort could just turn his head from side to side a little, but that was all.

Half-stunned for a moment, he could not think—he could just lie there supinely, desperately, looking up at the now starry sky.

Then a troop of bitter and hopeless reflections began to rush through his brain, jostling one another in mad confusion.

He was recalled from these by a new sensation.

The water had reached to his elbows, and was beating over his bound wrists.

"I've often watched the tide gradually swarm over these rocks from the foot of Eighty-sixth street over yonder, or from the Astoria shore," he thought. "In less than twenty minutes it will be flowing and beating, more than two feet deep over my dead face."

He turned his face, so as to look over the boiling waters of the Gate.

The two tides—the flood up through the harbor, and the flood back through Long Island Sound—met there in the whirling, dangerous commotion that gave the spot its ill-omened name.

Another sensation changed the current of his hideous reflections.

This time it was the advancing water washing over his chest, and so tumultuously that some of the mimic billows beat up over his neck and about his chin.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE TIDE'S EMBRACE.

To describe Mainwaring's situation—chained to the rock, in the pitiless arms of the up-springing tide—as desperate, is but faintly to emphasize his peril.

It is like calling Niagara's stupendous cataract "moist," or characterizing by some such adjective as "unsafe" or "disagreeable" a volcano's outpour or an earthquake's shock.

His situation seemed simply, absolutely and appallingly hopeless.

The water was now up to his lips—only the upper part of his face and head being not submerged.

He made a desperate effort and then gave a low moan of temporary relief.

The thongs about his wrists and arms, being of leather, had relaxed under the action of the water.

His hands and arms were free, the gag out of his mouth, and he was enabled to sit bolt upright.

But the relief was only temporary, for his knees and ankles, being fastened with hempen cords, which had shrunk under the same action that had loosened the thongs, were more painfully secure than ever, and no effort of the victim could mitigate their sufferings in the least degree.

The relief was only a respite, after all, and the steadily rising water was already washing up to his armpits.

"Why did I not remain quiet?" he thought, dreadingly. "In that case, all would have been over now. As it is, I have obtained perhaps fifteen minutes—fifteen minutes of agony and suspense. However, that is not long to wait. I wonder how my body will look here in the morning, when the tide shall have fallen. Or perhaps it will have been washed away into the caverns of the depths, leaving my fate a mystery. Lois! Ah, if I could but have won her to my heart before I died! And Issie, too. How strangely the dark and passionate beauty of her face haunts me at this dread hour. I wonder if, after all, it was she that was married to me. But I shall never know now, save in another world."

He was interrupted by a booming, pulsating sound, a long mountain of twinkling lights rushed between his vision and the Astoria shore, and then a wave broke high over his head, all but strangling him.

It was a wave from one of the great Sound steamers sweeping by, on her way to Stonington, Providence or Fall River.

When the disturbed water had sunk to its tidal level, permitting the detective to recover his breath, the floating palace had made the turn, and was no more than a dream.

The thought of the brimming life it had contained, and all so near and yet unconscious of his desolation and despair, fairly maddened him.

He began to rave and babble meaninglessly to himself, like hapless castaways upon a mid-sea raft in the far South Seas.

Then there was the sound of oars in rowlocks, and he came back to hope, and to horror.

It was a boat filled with the midnight relief of workmen for the Government excavating works on the neighboring reef.

His head was now just above water.

He tried to hail them, but the voice died in his throat—his dry tongue cleaved to the roof of his yet drier mouth.

He swallowed some of the nauseating brine, by this time literally brimming to his lips.

Then he found faint voice, but the boat had now passed beyond hailing distance.

He was relapsing into the idiocy that precedes dissolution and despair, when the clatter of rowlocks once more aroused him.

Then, by a last effort, he raised a great, despairing cry.

Was it heard and answered?

Yes, in a couple of shrill, frantic and yet encouraging voices, like those of women.

Nearer and nearer, till the rasp of the rowlocks was like grating thunder in his ears.

He could not cry out again, for the water was up to his nostrils, but he could see the advancing prow, looking like a tall ship's prow in the star-shine.

Then the waves were beating and clamoring about his very ears, and he knew no more.

Recovering consciousness, he found himself in the boat.

Two graceful figures, in feminine boating costume, but as wet and dripping as he, were chafing his hands, and one was wildly murmuring his name, while their vawl rocked at will in the boiling waters of the Gate.

He staggered up.

A convulsive spasm over the gunwale relieved him of the salt water he had swallowed, and he was almost himself again.

The young women clasped their hands, the one in silent thanksgiving, the other with joyous cries.

They were Lois and Issie.

"You are saved!" murmured the former.

"Saved, and chiefly through her!" Pointing to her companion.

"It is not true," cried Issie. "She first heard your cry—first located your head above the water!"

"And she dived down to cut your feet away from the rock!"

"No; we both did that!"

The detective gazed at them in a species of delighted stupefaction.

Then, seizing the oars, he began guiding the boat back into smoother water.

The exercise seemed to complete the restoration of his faculties.

"It seems like a miracle," he said. "Tell me how you came to know of my peril."

"Issie was warned of it—of Mrs. Bentincke's infamous intention—and then told me."

"Then Lois suggested a resort to our boating experience."

"Yes; but for Issie's energy, we could never have made the start."

"Lois, you are unfair to yourself. It was you that made Mr. Digby procure the boat for us at McComb's Dam, though you persisted in refusing to let him accompany us."

"I knew we could get on just as well without him. Besides—"

And so the generous rivalry proceeded, until the story of the romantic rescue was cloudily unfolded.

"When did you first learn of this?" asked the astonished Mainwaring.

"In the afternoon," they answered.

"And you mean to say that you have rowed down here from McComb's Dam Bridge, on the Harlem?"

"Yes; we started early."

He remained silent after that, working the boat mechanically, but with telling strokes.

They wanted to relieve him of the oars, but he would not have it; making them sit in the stern and talk, while he also managed to tell the particulars of his own adventure.

Issie had overheard Mrs. Bentincke conversing with a strange man in the garden, during which the murderous plot, just as it was subsequently carried out in almost every particular against the detective, was thoroughly pre-arranged.

Localities and points of time had been accurately provided.

Issie had, after some hesitation, owing to the recent coolness between them, carried her knowledge of the plot to Lois.

Their first impulse was to notify the police; their next the more romantic scheme which had been so opportunely carried out, though a delay of but a few moments would have been fatal, as has been seen.

"You say that Carolus Digby procured the boat for you?" said the detective.

"Yes."

"There are strange contradictions in that person's character that puzzle me."

He then recounted his previous adventures in which Digby had figured so contradictorily.

The young ladies were no less puzzled than he.

Everything pertaining to the unprecedented rescue having been at last explained, a silence of profound embarrassment fell upon the party, broken only by the dip and grating of the oars as the detective, having made the turn into the Harlem, pulled steadily for McComb's Dam, or, as it is now more generally called, Central Bridge.

This embarrassment will be readily understood as being of a most unusual character, especially so far as Mainwaring was concerned.

Owing his rescue from a horrible death to two fascinating young women, one of whom possessed his heart, while the other, at least in her own insistence, was the possessor of his hand, what could be more confused and perplexing.

Nor was this all.

Issie's family ties with the man and woman who had attempted this murderous wrong upon him—how could he ever name this unfortunate connection to her without at least a semblance of base ingratitude, after the tremendous obligation under which she had placed him?

He only groaned at the apparent hopelessness of the complication in which he found himself involved.

"One thing more," said he, turning to Issie, and breaking the painful silence at last, as they drew near their destination.

She looked up expectantly.

"The stranger," he went on, "whom you overheard Mrs. Bentincke plotting with in the garden—what was he like?"

"I can scarcely describe him, because his face was concealed. He seemed a rather short, thick-set man, rather roughly dressed, and muffled up quite mysteriously."

"Doubtless the same that accompanied the woman and her infamous husband in the yawl," he was saying, half to himself, when he caught sight of the young woman's shame-faced blush, and stopped short.

"Go on," she said, with pathetic firmness. "If it is no fault of mine, it is none the less true, I suppose, that the wretches are my parents."

"I shall not go on," he responded, gently. "I shall merely express the hope that my faithful assistant, poor Old Newthe, was not killed—that he will turn up, with nothing worse than a broken head, to once more help me in running these monsters down."

"Heaven grant that he may!" exclaimed Issie, fervently.

The light of a new dawn was broadening in the east as the boat approached the public float near the north end of the bridge.

Lois had silently passed to the prow, the boatkeeper was standing on the float awaiting them, and a solitary equipage—a fine horse and buggy, with a tall, cloaked figure at the reins—was slowly crossing the bridge near the float in the dim, but rapidly growing light.

"You all seem to have had a ducking," jocosely commented the boatkeeper, as a landing was effected. "It's a good thing for you, though, that the weather is so hot."

Here there was a startled exclamation from Lois, who had been the first to trip across the float to the roadway bridge-entrance.

"Save her!" suddenly screamed Issie. "He's carrying her off!"

But the tall, cloaked figure in the buggy had already bent far down over the wheels, and snatched up the startled girl in the crook of his powerful arm.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESCUE.

THEN there was a sharp click of the stranger's tongue, the animal darted forward obediently, and Lois was being whirled out of sight up the stretch of that famous concourse, the delight of New York's fashionable driving world, to the north of Central Bridge.

It all happened almost before the astounded spectators had had time to catch their breaths.

"It was Carolus Digby—I am sure it was!"

"The poor young lady! Was that chap her father or her lover?"

Such were the first startled exclamations of Issie and the boatkeeper.

But before the last syllable had quitted its utterer's lips, the Gliding Detective had sped like a greased arrow into a roadside lot, where a fine-looking horse was grazing.

"Hold on, sir!" yelled the boatkeeper. "I'll lend you the horse, and welcome—he's mine—but wait for a saddle and bridle!"

But Mainwaring had already backed the brute, causing him to take the low fence at a bound, and, guiding him solely by his voice and knees, was thundering up the road in pursuit.

"Lord, what riding!" exclaimed the boatkeeper. "Is the gentleman a circus-man, miss?"

Issie had sunk to rest upon one of the high-and-dry yawls, with which a part of the float was covered, and was striving to collect her thoughts.

"He may have been almost anything manly and courageous, for aught I know to the contrary," she replied, a little dreadingly. "But this I am sure of, that whatever mortal man can accomplish he is capable of."

She spoke with a strange desolateness of feeling; for was it not after her rival, and yet her friend—the other Lois—that he was now thundering in such desperate haste?

"Well, if he can only stick on," continued the man, "he's bound to overhaul the young lady's abductor, sooner or later. There ain't many chance-roadsters around here that can out-run or out-wind my big bay. But won't you step into the boat-house, miss, and rest yourself against the gentleman's return?"

She shook her head, thanking him in a low voice, and remained in her dejected attitude.

In the mean time, the detective, who was a superb horseman, was continuing his break-neck pursuit up the deserted roadway.

But, though the abductor had less than a quarter of a mile the start, it was doubtful, nonetheless the boatkeeper's boast, whether he would have been overtaken, but for an unlooked-for interception.

This happened in that woodland bordering stretch of road between the celebrated hostelry of Gabe Case's and the no less popular one known as Judge Smith's.

At this point, a short, thick-set man, armed with a stout cudgel, suddenly darted into the path of the speeding trotter from among the trees.

A well-delivered blow with the cudgel caused the animal first to swerve, and then to half-halt

and stagger in the traces, notwithstanding the shower of oaths and whip blows on the part of the exasperated driver.

In another instant, and while he was chiefly occupied in controlling the startled and plunging horse, the half-fainting Lois was torn from his grasp out over the wheels by the courageous cudgel-wielder; who, strangely enough, seemed to make a swift, imperative sign to the irate rascal as he stepped back to the road-line, with his lovely burden in his arms.

The other made a fierce, baffled gesture, and seemed to hesitate between fury and prudence.

But the pursuing hoof-beats were by this time clamoring less than a furlong behind.

He whipped up once more, and quickly disappeared around the bend of the road.

The detective had seen and welcomed the opportune assistance to his cause, without recognizing the man that afforded it.

Judge of his astonishment now in having the young lady surrendered to his charge by no less a personage than Old Newthe!

"Heavens!" cried Mainwaring; "you are still alive then, old stand-by?"

"It kinder looks like it, sir," was the laconic reply.

"But what fortunate hocus-pocus is this? How on earth did you chance hereabouts, and so opportunely?"

"All shall be explained in due time, Mr. Mainwaring. In the mean time, you have your hands full." With a gesture toward Lois, who was now struggling to descend from her uneasy seat before the bare-back horseman, into which she had been rather unceremoniously lifted. "Good-by, sir. Thank God, you also have escaped the horrors of last night!"

With that, the old man darted into the wood, and disappeared.

Lois, still partly dazed, was feebly continuing her struggle.

"Let me down, Guy—Mr. Mainwaring, I mean—let me down this instant!" she exclaimed. "I thank you for rescuing me—I shall never forget you—your kindness, your bravery—but this is not right! I am perfectly capable of walking. Do let me get down, sir!"

"But I can best carry you back in this way," he remonstrated. "No one else will see you—there's not a soul abroad yet."

"It matters not, sir. Let me down—I insist! I can walk, I tell you."

But she had hardly taken three steps, after being set on her feet, before she began to stumble and reel.

Without paying further heed to her protests, Mainwaring again snatched her up before him, and galloped back to the bridge.

A cold, strained look came into Issie's face as she perceived in what guise they reappeared.

But she said nothing, only gently receiving Lois in her arms, and retiring with her into the boat-house, while the boatkeeper was enthusiastic in his encomiums.

"By cracky, sir! I didn't think you'd manage it at first," he exclaimed, looking over the perspiring horse, which had sustained no injury from his hard breathing. "But when I see'd how you stuck to the critter's spine as if glued there, then I was sure you'd overhaul that roan trotter inside o' three furlongs."

The detective briefly explained the real state of the case, and satisfied the man for the use of the boat—he would accept nothing for the services of the horse.

"By the way," added Mainwaring, after a pause. "Do you remember the man who engaged the boat at the young ladies' request?"

"Purty well, sir. A big, muscular gent, with long side-whiskers, and so much like a blasted Londoner in his togs as to make you laugh."

"So. And did you recognize him as the same man who has just tried to carry the young lady off?"

The man pondered a moment, and then slapped his thigh.

"By Jupiter! yes, now I come to put 'em together, they were one and the same," he exclaimed. "He was dressed like a gentleman this last time—that's what must have confused me. By Jingo, sir! this with an eagerly inquisitive look, 'there's mysteries and mysteries goin' on in society now, isn't they?'"

The detective nodded, and, the young ladies reappearing at that moment, he lost no further time in escorting them to the mansion-house.

"We're luckily not far from home," remarked Issie, on the way thither. "And it is still so early that we shall probably be able to slip back to our rooms without our absence having been noticed."

She seemed to have recovered her equanimity now, and Lois had also in a great measure regained her composure.

Still, the former embarrassment had come up on the trio, and hardly another word was spoken before Rose Hill was reached.

Fortunately, none of the household was stirring as yet.

Mainwaring had accompanied the young women through the garden to the piazza.

Here, after a few murmured and hardly intelligible words of acknowledgment, Lois had

disappeared into her side of the house, with an averted face.

He was looking rather reproachfully after her, thinking that Issie had also retired.

But she had lingered, and now ventured to touch his hand.

As he gravely regarded her, there was a pitiable assumption of playfulness in the darkly-beautiful, but anxious face.

"A penny for your thoughts!" she murmured.

"They are scarcely worth it, Issie," he replied, "they are so hopelessly confused."

"But what are you chiefly thinking about just now?"

"About that enigma in human form, Carolus Digby. I don't know what to think or make of him."

She colored, having doubtless hoped for some complimentary allusion to her part in his rescue from the river-rock, but gave no other betrayal of her disappointment.

"You may well call the man an enigma," she assented. "But let us hope that there may be a speedy solution of it."

He again fell into a reverie, to be again roused from it by the touch of her hand.

She was looking at him with a world of passionate entreaty in her loveliness.

"Oh, Guy! why won't you say something to me?"

Her eyes were wild, her red lips quivering, her beautiful hands extended tremblingly toward him, bent and moving like the talons of a startled bird.

He understood, and, while unable to respond to her supplication, was suddenly inspired by a frenzy not unlike her own.

"Angel or sorceress! woman—Issie!" he cried, hoarsely; "tell me the truth before Heaven—are you, or are you not, my wife?"

There was just a flash of hesitation—or was it a conscience-stricken fear?—before the answer rushed from her lips:

"I am, I am your wife! Before Heaven I swear it, Guy!"

But no; in that brief flash his doubt had returned.

But no less perplexing was the doubt as to her insincerity.

Why not give her the benefit thereof?

She was so young, she was radiantly beautiful, she was rich, she loved him to distraction; while, apart from the youth and beauty, how could he know but that his longed-for Lois was the reverse of this, or was there proof that she still loved him?

For an instant there was a recurrence of the impulse to accept the situation as inevitable—to snatch the beseeching beauty to his heart.

Then, by a mighty effort, his moral nature was once more in the ascendant, and he fought the impulse down.

"Issie, I cannot—I simply cannot!"

His voice broke while saying it, but his face was resolved, though of ashy paleness.

Then he took her hands in his, patting them soothingly, and drawing her slightly to him, as a brother might have done to a lovely and distressed sister.

"At least I cannot now—not yet," he troublously added.

She caught at the hope, poor and meager as it was, her eyes glowing, the rich color fluctuating in the transparent olive of her face.

He continued to pet and soothe her, after that brotherly fashion.

"Let us speak of other things," said he.

"Indeed, it becomes necessary that we should do so."

She bowed her head.

"Mrs. Bentincke," he began, "should she venture to return here—"

She interrupted him furiously.

"Return!" she echoed. "She will not dare to!"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

"LET us hope not," said the detective.

"She will not dare it, I tell you!" exclaimed Issie. "She shall not look upon my face again. She has attempted *your* life—from what you have told me. She has confessed to having contrived my benefactor's assassination! Should she dare approach me again, I would have her arrested as the vilest criminal! I swear it!"

He bowed his head.

"You could do nothing else—of course I cannot but applaud such a determination—and yet—"

She snatched away her hands, her face crimsoning, her frame quivering.

"And yet—do I not know, without your saying it?—and yet she is my mother!"

She buried her face in her hands.

When she raised it again it was pale, but set.

"It would make no difference," she said, between her teeth. "She has attempted your life—she is even worse, as self-confessed. A murderer and my mother maybe, but shall not remain, as one. She shall be hunted down remorselessly. It shall make no difference with me."

He hesitated.

He did not like to say how much difference it would necessarily, even in her most hoped-for event, make with him—that criminal family tie.

She understood him, and her agitation returned.

"My God! yes, that is it," she wailed. "The wretch is still my flesh and blood. Oh, torture! And if I must call such a being mother, what must that other—what must my father—be like?"

Mainwaring's commiseration for her was immense.

And thus far he was finding himself on dangerous ground.

Pity is so near allied to love, when beauty sorrows and devotion pleads.

He had it not in his heart to say aloud that he had seen that father, and had shuddered at his vileness, but the words were in his looks.

She suddenly seized his hands, and covered them with kisses.

"Guy, Guy, Guy!" she murmured; "you shall not disown me. Only retain that possible place for me in your heart, my love, my life, my husband! I shall win my way to it, if it must be through their guilty blood!"

Then she darted away, and was gone.

As he was retracing his way to the gate, Justine Deschappelles stole out of the shrubbery, and confronted him.

The detective had had but little acquaintance with the French maid.

She was a comely Parisian, dark and mysterious-looking, but with something attractive about her, and now she seemed to have been wakeful and perhaps weeping.

"Will he come again, Monsieur Mainwaring?" she exclaimed, in her rather pretty broken English. "Ah, monsieur! tell me that he will come again."

The detective smiled.

There was a sensation of relief for him in this young woman's rather transparent trouble.

"You mean Luke? Ah, I see. Yes, Justine, he will doubtless come again. You have quarreled then?"

She softly began to weep.

He began to see his way to something precious in the way of elucidation.

He cared little now if Justine might know anything of the murders, but, with regard to the mystery of his marriage—to the truth or untruth of Issie's claim upon him—she must still remain, in the absence of the officiating clergyman and his wife, the sheet anchor of his hope.

"Don't cry," said he, sympathetically. "What seems to have been the matter? Was your lover unreasonable?"

"Ah, monsieur, a fiend, a demon, a wild man!"

Mainwaring could not help laughing.

"Come, come; not so bad as that," said he. "I can guess the cause of your quarrel."

"Ah, no, monsieur. He is a monster, a despot!"

"Nonsense! You persist in remaining obdurate, and he is losing patience. That is all."

"I obdurate, monsieur? What is obdurate, monsieur?"

"Hard—unyielding—obstinate in unreasonable secrecy."

"Ah! but I am as wax, as putty, as the clay in the potter's hand."

"Why not, then, respond to his demand for your confidence?"

She shuddered.

"Ah, that murder—that hideous murder!" she murmured. "What should I know of it, monsieur?"

He suddenly seized her wrist, and riveted her with his searching gaze.

"Never mind that—at least for the present," he said, sternly. "But you undoubtedly do know of something else, Justine."

"Ah, monsieur, no! I am fright, I am terrify!"

"Listen, Justine. I believe you honest in intention, but over zealous in your fidelity to your young mistress. You understand?"

"Ah, monsieur!"

"What was the truth of this marriage deception she pretends to have played upon me? You are in the secret, I am sure of it. Unbosom it to me this instant!"

"Ah, but I cannot—I dare not."

He rudely cast away her hand.

"Then you shall never have Luke Jardine for a husband, depend upon it! Say no more."

"Ah, monsieur, say not so! He is my life, my breath! You will bring him back, monsieur? See, I clasp my two hands, I wring my heart!"

"Excuse my saying it, young woman, but—Oh, bosh!"

"Ah, monsieur; but if I some time say all, will you then—"

"Then your Luke shall be at your feet—I swear it. Tell me now what I wish to know."

"Ah, *pas maintenant*—not now, monsieur. Sometime, sometime."

"This instant!"

She would only clasp her hands, and shake her head—her wonted final way with Luke himself, as the latter had frequently reported.

The detective turned on his heel, with an expression of rage and impatience.

"Wait, monsieur, wait!" she had snatched his hand. "There is something else."

"What is it?"

"He is jealous, monsieur!"

"Oh, the deuce he is!" he was turning angrily away once more when his curiosity came languidly to the surface. "You mean that Luke is jealous?"

"Alas, monsieur!—a fiend, a demon, a tempest!"

He laughed afresh, in spite of himself.

"Who is he jealous of?"

"Ah, monsieur, he is cruel, he is crazy!"

"But what man is he jealous of? Don't be so ridiculous!"

"Not of a man, monsieur."

"Whom can he be jealous of, then?"

"Not of a man, but of men."

"Of men?"

"Yes, there are two, monsieur."

"Who are they, in heaven's name?"

"Oh, monsieur, two such men! Monsieur Calthorpe, Mademoiselle Lois's papa, and Monsieur Deegby! The idea, monsieur, the idea!"

And, with an emotional sob at parting, the little Frenchwoman skurried away through the garden trees.

"More mystery, ever a fresh mystery!" muttered the detective, as he pursued his homeward way. "What the deuce can the girl mean? But I suppose Jardine will explain things in the course of time."

He lodged in a humble but spacious room, overlooking the water near the East or Harlem river foot of 123d street.

Worn out with the exhausting adventures through which he had passed, he was preparing for bed with a feeling of intense relief and satisfaction, when a scrap of paper hastily pinned under his coat-lapel attracted his attention.

It contained these words, in a scrawling, unknown hand:

"Let the Gliding Detective beware! His enemies are sleepless. He may escape a hundred times, and yet is the doom preparing for him that no luck or cleverness may turn aside."

An unsigned scrawl, a wordy menace—that was all!

But how and when had it become fastened to his coat?

There was the rub, and a perplexing one, at that.

He reflected.

The paper had not been wet, and was consequently placed there after his submersion on the rock.

But by whom?

Placing both Issie and Lois out of the question, he had since then, to the best of his knowledge, come in close proximity to but two persons.

These were Old Newthe and Justine Deschappelles, from whom he had just separated.

The former was beyond his suspicion now, and, as for the other—could Justine be playing a double part, half in the interest of her lover, and half in devotion to the infamous Mrs. Bentincke?

No; he could not bring himself to think so.

Then there was the boatkeeper, also at once dismissed as soon as thought of, and—he started.

Yes; while ascending to his room, a moment previous, some one, a woman whom he had not thought to look twice at, had passed him on the still darkened stairs.

Much perplexed, he threw on a dressing-gown and rung his bell.

Mrs. McGinty, his landlady, rather tardily made her appearance.

She was an honest, hard-working Irish woman, of much amplitude of form and inexhaustible good-nature, though a trifle sleepy-eyed at this juncture.

"Good-morning, Mrs. McGinty! Who was it, pray, that passed me on the stairs on my way up?"

She burst into her pleasant laugh.

"Troth, an' it was meself, sir!" she replied. "But ye looked so absorbed that I didn't venture to shpake."

"Oh, it was you, was it?"

"Surely, sir, an' yit—" she hesitated. "'Twas about an hour ago, I suppose ye m'ane, sir?"

"Not at all—less than five minutes ago. I have just returned."

Mrs. McGinty looked blank, but brightened up again.

"Och, thin it must have been the gentleman on the top flure! You're of wan shape, an' the light was dim."

"Like enough. Then you did not pass me on the stairs five or six minutes back?"

"Sure an' I did not, sir. I'd have had to be in the basement kitchen an' on the stairs at wan an' the same time to do it, sir; an', not bein' possessed wid the yewsbiquities—"

"Some one did pass me, though, and it was a woman."

"Unpossible, your Honor!"

"Why impossible?"

"There's divil of a woman in the blissed house but meself."

"Are you sure?"

"Faix, en' am I sure of the contents of me own house? Was there iver the loike of it?"

"But a woman passed me at the time—I would swear to it."

The good woman now grew thoroughly troubled.

"Och! an' is it faymale thayves an' bu'glers I have in me house at my time o' life?" she cried. "Wait till I get me rollin'-pin. I'll explore the howl place!"

"Do so. I'm too thoroughly exhausted to accompany you now. But if you want assistance, don't hesitate to call upon me. That will do."

"What was she loike, sir?"

"A woman as large as yourself, but the light was dim, and I paid little attention. Don't forget to call me, if you want any help."

"Indade, an' I'll not call you, but a policeman, if needs be, sir! You look that pale an' haggard that me heart bleeds for ye, sir. But don't fear for me—there's pith in me owld arm yit, if a bu'gler it shall prove. Good rest to ye, sir."

She hurried away for her rolling-pin, and Mainwaring, weary of the subject and pretty much everything else, lost no further time in rolling into bed, where he was almost instantly plunged in sleep.

He was awakened by a heated and suffocating sensation.

Smoke and flames were springing and curling around him.

He strove to bound from the bed, but found it impossible.

A realization of the master-horror of his life was upon him.

He was tied to the bed, and the bed was on fire!

CHATTER XV.

THE BED OF FIRE.

BUT even then, the detective had not realized to the full the unexampled horror of his predicament.

He had been bound, hand and foot, neck and crop, to the burning bed while lying on the flat of his back, with his head pillowed rather high.

A familiar smell apprised him that the edges of the couch had been saturated with kerosene, prior to the application of the incendiary match.

But this was mingled with another smell, with which he was less familiar.

An instant explanation of it was at hand.

Failing in the effort to spring from the couch of fire, his next impulse was, naturally enough, to open his mouth to yell for help.

Even such a slight action caused a wet towel, poised on the billowing pillow just above his forehead, to roll down over his mouth and nostrils, and to remain clinging there.

The towel proved to have been saturated with chloroform—thus accounting for the intermingling odor that had at first been irrecognizable.

The man seemed doomed.

His attempted outcry ended in a spasmodic gulp.

But even at this juncture the Gliding Detective's presence of mind did not wholly desert him.

He clinched his teeth, and held his breath, determined not to inhale the deadly fumes until the actual contact of the scorching flames might prompt him to hail the less painful death as a positive doom.

Here a low, demoniac laugh, and yet a woman's laugh, smote his ears.

It was succeeded by a voice, yet more deadly in its import.

"Spy! Scorpion! marplot-detective!" it mocked; "behold and feel the torturing doom of such as would meddle with a master-scheme. Fair rest to thee on thy bed of fire!"

The tone, even apart from the epithets—which were not new to his understanding, made him recognize the voice as the fiendish ex-housekeeper's.

Then there was a rustle of a robe, repetition of the pitiless laugh, and he knew that she had quitted the room, leaving him to his fate.

He could scarcely move an inch, he could not cry out, he could not gnash his teeth—the poison-saturated towel rendering even that equivocal relief inadmissible.

He could only gaze up to the ceiling, which the curling smoke was already blackening.

There, however, a stout iron ring suddenly engaged his thoughts.

It seemed firmly imbedded in the plaster, and had at one time suspended the frame of a mosquito netting.

Even in that crucial moment his thoughts went out to that iron ring.

Oh! if he might but link two of his sinewy fingers through it, how quickly, how nimbly would he wrench himself upward, and clear at a swinging bound that bed of fire.

At this instant a first convulsive tremor thrilled his frame.

The flames had for the first time licked his naked flesh—rasping his right forearm and wrist with their scorching breath!

A vision of the early Christian martyrs rushed upon him.

Just such must have been their shriveling re-

coil as the blaze of the fagots first scorched their flesh—a foretaste of the torturing hour.

But what was this?

The first fire-pang was not less a friend.

There was a snapping of charred bonds, and his right arm was free!

To tear away the towel, draw a great lung-filling breath, and then release his other members, was the work of a desperate instant.

But the edges of the bed were now blazing on every side.

He was enveloped in a straight-ascending curtain of flame and smoke, a fleeting breath of which into his lungs, even in a single bound to one side, might be fatal.

The ring, the ring in the ceiling!

His mad longing of an instant before was realized—the ring was in his powerful grasp.

Neither had he overestimated his muscular proficiency.

He drew himself far up with the one hand, spurned the mattress with his feet, and gave his body a curving launch.

There was a sheeted hot breath as he clove the flame-vail with a rush, and he found himself in the middle of the floor.

He was scarcely scorched, but the cold evening air that came flowing in from over the water was like cooling oil to his red-heated frame.

Then to spring to an adjoining cupboard, in which were stored a number of fire-extinguishing flasks, was the work of another instant.

A few minutes later the erst-burning fabric was a heap of smoldering but harmless ashes.

A plunge-bath, luckily obtainable in an adjoining room, soon restored our detective to something like his old self, physically and mentally.

He had come out of river's bed unharmed, and now, like a veritable salamander, he had stepped unscathed out of the fire's embrace.

He was putting the finishing touches upon his hasty toilet when Mrs. McGinty, now for the first time getting a whiff of the miniature conflagration, came rushing into the bedroom, followed by Luke Jardine, who had just chanced to stop in to inquire after the welfare of his friends.

"Well, Mrs. McGinty, did you find your female bu'gler?" inquired the detective, after her astonishment over the unlooked-for scene had somewhat expended itself.

"No, sir," was the reply. "I searched high an' low, but divil a woman was in the house but meself."

"Indeed!" pointing to the remains of the bed.

"Well, there is, nevertheless, a pretty convincing proof that I was right, while you were wrong."

And he forthwith gave them the particulars of his escape.

The good woman could at first only throw up her hands in mute amazement, while Jardine gravely listened without making any immediate comments.

"Glory be to God!" cried the landlady, at last; "is it haunted or bewitched that we are?"

"Neither the one nor the other," said Mainwaring, coolly. "A fiend in petticoats has simply pursued me into the house in some way, and attempted my death by toasting. That is about the size of it."

She ran out to tell her neighbors, and perhaps carry a notification to the authorities.

"Come, Luke," said the detective, "let us get out of this while we can. There is much I have to say to you."

For better security (he had by this time become distrustful of his own shadow, he led the way to a well-known open-air refreshment saloon on the southeast corner of the Third Avenue bridge over the Harlem.

It was six in the evening, the weather being sultry and oppressive.

The saloon under consideration is erected on stout supports over a boat-float, at the water's edge, which is here in reasonable weather a free-and-easy, popular resort.

Seated at a table overlooking the water, the two friends had the accommodations almost wholly to themselves for the time-being.

Here, with the pleasure-boats lazily coming and going before their eyes, and with the traffic-sounds of the neighboring bridge and avenue only reaching their ears in a confused murmur, the Gliding Detective proceeded to break his long fast with an elaborate fish and oyster dinner, while giving his friend and coadjutor a full account of his late astounding adventures.

Jardine listened with such rapt attention as only such a varied and hair-raising narrative could call forth to the fullest capacity.

"I wonder to see you alive!" was his simple comment at the close. "It sounds like Baron Trenck's misfortunes, with the cream of Rider Haggard's extravagant fictions, boiled into one."

"I cannot but marvel at my own escapes," said Mainwaring, modestly. "But it has long been a truism, as you know, that fact is stranger than fiction."

"Of course, this Mrs. Bentincke, or whatever we must call her, will not venture to appear at the mansion-house again."

"Hardly. Whatever her faults, Issie's resentment against the woman is undoubtedly

genuine. But apart from all this, let me bring you to the consideration of a particular question."

"What is that?"

"By whom, and when, was that written warning, or menace, pinned to my coat?"

Jardine knitted his brows.

"Not by the woman who passed you on the stairs," said he, after a pause—"not by Mrs. Bentincke. I feel certain of that."

"So do I. But you have seen the writing. Scrawl as it is, no woman can have written it."

"True. Let me think."

Jardine's face suddenly lighted up.

"I have it—I am sure of it. But, in your present state of mind, you will scout the idea."

"What idea?"

"As to who pinned on the writing."

"Who do you think it was?"

"It isn't so much a surmise as a conviction."

"Who did it?"

"Old Newthe."

Mainwaring gazed at his friend in astonishment.

"Impossible! you are crazy!"

"I knew you would say just that."

"But I have tested him—he is as true as steel!"

"I don't believe it. He has been hoodwinking you from the word go."

Mainwaring reflected.

He had great respect for his friend's opinion, and there was no blinking certain things in support of the one advanced.

Still he could not come to believe that he had not tested the old man to the full and found him true.

"You would have me believe, then," said he, slowly, "that the old fellow has been actually playing me into the hands of my enemies?"

"Yes."

"Well, as we should probably never agree on that point, we had better shift the subject."

"Agreed, old fellow."

"Now, then, as to your part of the game in hand."

"Cut away!"

"How about your quarrel with Justine, and the odd causes she assigns for it?"

And he recounted more fully his strange interview with the French maid.

Jardine burst into a laugh.

"We're friends again now," said he, "and the apparent oddness in her story is easily explained."

Before he could proceed, however, a strong-built, much-bearded man, in the garb of a sailor, touched his man-o'-war's cap to them from the float, just under the rail near which they were sitting, and asked if he might not take them for a row.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BRIDGE-DRAW.

A NEGATIVE was given the man in reply, and then the young men's attention was directed to the swinging draw of the bridge, which was just then being put in operation to let through a small flotilla of barges in tow of a vigorously-pulling little tug.

But the sailor-looking fellow persisted in his request.

"Ye could enjoy a fine sail afore the night shuts down, gents," said he, in a voice that seemed to come in jerks from the pit of his stomach, it was so rumbling and deep. "See; yon is my messmate, with as trim a craft as ye'll find."

And he pointed to a heavy-set, somewhat older man, also much bearded, who was hovering, apparently with a keen eye to business, in a handsome boat just a little way off the float.

"We shan't row to-night, thank you," repeated Mainwaring, a little abruptly. "Please don't ask us again."

The man touched his cap submissively, and leaned against one of the supports, looking out over the water with a disappointed air.

"I don't altogether like that chap, nor his chum either," observed Jardine, in a low voice.

"What's the matter with them?" asked the detective, absently. "Anything suspicious?"

"Nothing on the surface; but remember the bad tricks that have been played upon you in such swift succession. One can't be too watchful."

"Of course not. But just observe the great draw yonder, how smoothly and yet powerfully it swings. There! it is open at last."

There came the sharp clicking sound characteristic of the Harlem Bridge draw in both opening and shutting, and the flotilla began to pass through the passage.

Jardine had also become interested afresh, and he, moreover, had a natural inclination for works of engineering skill.

"That bridge is a wonder in its way," said he, expatiatingly, "but it is said to have some grave engineering faults."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes; and one of the chief ones is the jarring suddenness with which the draw clicks back in the return. There; it is swinging back now. Snap! she goes. The intervening lattice-gates are not properly attended, either. Why, an unwary foot passenger might have his leg ripped

off like a radish by those sharp connections in a jiffy!"

"Foot passengers shouldn't be unwary, you know."

"True; but they might be better protected against themselves. Hallo! another flotilla? There'll be another jam on the bridge-way, while waiting for that poky draw."

"Which won't prevent, I trust, your going on with your explanation of that quarrel with Justine."

Jardine burst into a fresh laugh.

"Why didn't you bring me back to my sheep before, as the Italians would say?" he cried.

"Every man his own sheep-dog."

"Well, there really wasn't any quarrel at all—at least, not on my part."

"What! all that emotional business of the French girl's purely unnecessary?"

"At least, superfluous; though I really meant her to believe that I was jealous."

"What for?"

"The deuce! to stir her up in that anticipated unbosoming of mysteries, which still hangs fire."

"Ah! I begin to understand."

"I've only allowed her to mollify my jealous fury on condition that she shall make a clean breast of it inside of a week's time."

"Better than nothing, surely; but I wish the time were shorter."

"So do I, my boy; but better half a loaf than no bread."

"The girl unquestionably loves you."

"I'm sure of that."

"Why then does she persist in deferring the promised revelation?"

Jardine grew grave.

"Justine also loves her young mistress, Miss Issie," said he, after a pause.

"But you don't imagine that any confession of hers can possibly implicate Issie in—in the murders?"

"No, sir!"

This very decidedly, while Mainwaring likewise drew a long sigh of relief.

Much as he felt that Issie's passion might have wronged him, in the matter of the doubtful marriage, any proof of the beautiful girl having been an accomplice of the assassin would have desolated his nature.

"What elucidation do you then hope to gain from the girl?" asked the detective.

Jardine grasped his hand.

"Can't you guess?"

"After a fashion. But answer my question. What do you expect to gain from Justine?"

"The truth as to which was the bride, and which is your wife, my boy."

Mainwaring cordially returned the hand-clasp.

"Justine is in possession of that secret, then?"

"I feel sure of it."

"And she promises its disclosure?"

"Inside of a week."

Mainwaring gave an inward groan.

"A week—it seems an age!"

"It is the best she will promise."

"But why will not her fidelity to her young mistress be as strong then as now?"

"I am unable to say. Justine is a conundrum."

"Are not they all that—every woman of them?"

Jardine laughed.

"I am afraid they are."

"However, I feel encouraged."

"You ought to."

"Yes; for if Issie, and not Lois, did really become my bride, why should Justine, if truly her confidante, act in this conditional, protective sort of way with regard to the coming revelation?"

"That is the way it strikes me. And yet—"

"And yet what?" with renewed anxiety.

"And yet, in the mean time, there remains Lois's steadfast and indignant denial on her part."

"True!" And, with knitted brows, the detective brought his fist down heavily upon a corner of the dish-covered table. "By Heaven! it is exasperating—it is bewildering."

"Better think of something else, then."

"Think of something else! How can I? Was ever man so bewilderingly entangled and immeshed before? Not to know which of two fascinating girls he has been married to!"

"It is tough."

"The one eager to claim him as the bridegroom of the occasion, and he not able to respond to her passion!"

"True."

"The other, while perhaps also loving him, just as earnest in denying the marriage, and he ready to lay down his life for her!"

"It is unprecedented."

"You call them conundrums. They're worse than that—riddles, enigmas, sphinxes!"

"You can still get no word of our truant officiating parson and his wife?"

"Not a line, not a syllable! This disappearance of the old lawyer—the custodian of Mr. Calthorpe's later will, as I feel persuaded—is scarcely in itself more absolute and unaccountable. Little good might it do me in my quandary, even were it otherwise!"

"You are right. The mysterious bride's veil

was not raised. How should Mr. Quackenbush or his wife be better able to identify her for a certainty than we?"

There was another groan from the detective, this time an audible one.

"Then you are still convinced," pursued Jardine, most willing to vary the topic, "that the later will is in the missing lawyer's possession?"

"I haven't a lingering doubt of it."

In spite of Mrs. Bentincke's declaration that she found and destroyed it?"

The detective snapped his fingers contemptuously.

"That for her declaration! It was her most natural lie under the villainous circumstances."

"Yet you believe in her having contrived the double murder, in accordance with her confession to you in the boat?"

"Yes; I must needs believe that."

"Why?"

"My life was in the hollow of her hand—she thought my death as good as an accomplished fact. She could, therefore, afford to taunt me with a true confession of the crime."

"True, but, under the same circumstances, why should she have thought it worth while to lie to you in the less criminal matter—the destruction of the later will?"

Mainwaring pondered the question.

"Probably," he answered at last, "to help along her daughter's claim upon me, in the vaguely possible event of my escaping the murderous doom designed for me."

Jardine shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, that won't do!" said he. "The admission of the same possibility on her part would have just as naturally hindered her confession as have prompted the falsehood. It won't work."

The detective made an exasperated gesture, as if to dash aside a bewildering network.

"Enough of it—to the deuce with it all, at least for the present!"

"With all my heart!"

"To return to Justine—so you only pretended to be jealous?"

"Yes."

"But why of 'Mr. Deegby,' and, above all, of Lois's father, Mr. Reuben Calthorpe? What grounds had you to build a pretense of jealousy on?"

Jardine gave another laugh.

"Hardly any at all, I must confess. I had seen Digby exchanging a few words in the garden with her, and then Mr. Calthorpe questioning her shortly afterward. It was all plain enough to me."

"How did you explain it?"

"Just as Justine did subsequently. Digby had been trying to pump the girl with regard to her relations with me. Mr. Calthorpe had seen them together, and was just as desirous of pumping her with regard to what Digby had had to say, for he is in mortal fear of the fellow."

"And you pretended to think that they were complimenting your sweetheart too highly on her good looks?"

"Yes. And the pretense answered my purpose, after a fashion, as I have shown you. But what was that jarring motion, think you?"

The flooring, upon which a number of others had by this time assembled for eating and drinking, had unmistakably trembled.

"More likely the action of the waves than of an earthquake," replied Mainwaring, composedly. "See; that industrious bridge is opening for a fresh flotilla. It is the fourth time, since we have been sitting here."

Here the saloon floor shook again.

"What can have become of that big sailor chap who was so persistent about giving us a pleasuring?" said Jardine, looking down a little curiously over the rail. "He was still leaning against one of the supports there a moment ago."

"Perhaps he has slipped underneath to beg a snack from one of the kitchen hands. But what did he amount to? There's a prettier sight out yonder. What a lovely pair of boys!"

Mainwaring pointed to a graceful rowboat that was idling near in the pleasant twilight.

The occupants—two handsome lads in boating costume, apparently sixteen or seventeen, the one dark, the other fair—were resting upon their oars, and seemingly gazing up at the young men with unusual curiosity.

"Ah, pretty enough, perhaps," assented Jardine, absently. "But what they can find to interest them so much in our direction I can't imagine. Hal! that jar again. Let's be getting out of this, old fellow. I've heard before that the pavilion is deemed somewhat insecure, and—"

The sentence was never finished, for at that instant there was a shock, a wavering to and fro, a splintering crash, and the entire outer edge of the pavilion was shunted bodily into the river.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MODERN SAMSON.

THE float under the saloon had been partly submerged by the weight of the falling fabric,

and this, by furnishing a wet and slippery sort of chute, had facilitated the completeness of the catastrophe.

Mainwaring, Jardine and several others who had been seated near the rail were struggling in the water amid the debris of the ruin, which, however, had fortunately been composed, barring the flooring itself, of light and fragile material.

"Curse that sailor chap!" sputtered Jardine, floundering about. "Purposely or not, he must have knocked away those supports. I think I could swear to it!"

"There he is now, in the boat with his chum!" cried Mainwaring. "After them! There may be fresh villainy at the bottom of this."

And he forthwith struck out after the boat in question, eagerly followed by his friend, for they were both expert swimmers, and the water was warm enough to afford a grateful sensation.

The two handsome lads eagerly sculled their shell in the same direction, as if to offer assistance.

But they were roughly signed by the swimmers to lend their aid to others in greater need of it, while the pursuit of the boat containing the sailor and his friend was continued.

The latter, however, had succeeded in effecting a landing at the southern abutment of the bridge, and, abandoning their boat, were running up the stone steps.

Mainwaring and Jardine, dripping but determined, were following remorselessly, the chase being now transferred to dry land.

"Head off those men!" yelled Jardine. "They contrived the thing—they are responsible for the accident!"

But the words were unheard or unheeded, and then pursued and pursuers were among the jam on the bridge-way.

The whistle had again sounded, however, the gates were about being shut, and the draw was once more trembling on the turn, causing the crowd to surge back.

Both the runaways bounded through the gate, out upon the draw.

"After them!" panted Mainwaring. "Once on the turn with them, their escape is impossible."

But at this instant he was suddenly pounced upon by the fugitives, knocked down, and his body thrown on the dividing line, so that it should be cut into by the edge of the draw, already on the swing.

Horror-struck, no less than mystified, the gatekeeper swore while the crowd yelled, pushing this way and that.

But Jardine had sprung, like a tiger to his principal's assistance. Supported by a rough but honest-looking laboring man.

The would-be murderers were pressed back, and the detective torn from his perilous position almost at the last instant.

Not quite the last, though.

The generous laboring man at this critical juncture, furiously throttled by the sailor's companion, was jerked forward with an oath.

He fell headlong over upon the last corner of the swinging draw.

Both his legs were cut off at the ankle, the severed members falling into the river, the quivering body being carried, together with the infamous agents of the tragedy, around upon the draw, beyond the reach of immediate assistance.*

The horror that ensued among the spectators of this appalling scene is simply indescribable.

Women fainted by the dozen, and strong men wept, wringing their hands and tearing their hair.

To add to the dramatic element of the scene, the two scoundrels made no effort to succor their victim, but were presently seen to jump into the river from the other end of the draw, after which they were not seen again.

The bridge was, fortunately, soon made continuous once more, and the poor sufferer placed in the charge of a hospital surgeon, who had been summoned with an ambulance.

But the man had already lost so much blood as to be hopelessly beyond aid.

He had, however, a few moments of consciousness before expiring.

Raising his head from the improvised pillow that had been placed under it by the surgeon and his assistant, he fastened his eyes upon the Gliding Detective with a devouring look.

Mainwaring was bending at his side in an instant.

"I've saved you ag'in!" gasped the sufferer. "Once more have I been thrust between you and your doom—only the first time it was my dog, 'stead of me. Don't you remember?"

The detective started back.

Wonderful fatality.

Yes; sure enough, now he recalled that face—the face of the unknown workman whose dog had perished under the vitriol shower in front of the agency building.

Obedient to another sign, he once more bent forward.

* Founded strictly upon fact, a similar tragedy having actually occurred at Harlem Bridge several years ago.—AUTHOR.

"You weren't to blame—an' it don't differ much," were the closing articulations. "I ain't got no fam'ly or friends to cry over me. Even my dog—last friend I had—I'm jest a-follerin' him—that's all!"

He was dead.

"Did you know the man, sir?" asked the surgeon.

The Gliding Detective had arisen, pale and haggard, but collected.

"I did not," he truthfully replied. "I had seen the poor fellow once before, but did not know his name."

Here there was an outcry that the miscreants who had leaped from the draw had been seen to scramble into a boat, and row up-stream.

As Mainwaring and Jardine dashed back to the landing, for the purpose of continuing the pursuit by water, they were rather timidly called upon by a lad, who was slipping his way sinuously through the crowd.

It was the darker of the two picturesque boys whom they had noticed just previous to the fall of the pavilion.

He laid his hand on Mainwaring's arm.

"My chum and I have a splendid boat, sir," said he, "and we are at your service."

A double assenting nod was the response.

A few moments later they were seated in the stern of the row-boat, which was being rapidly propelled up the glooming river by the young oarsmen, who proved themselves both vigorous and expert.

The twilight had deepened, but the glimmering of the watery expanse was visible for a considerable distance ahead: and the view included a clumsy-looking craft that was running away as fast as its brace of occupants could paddle it.

"There they are!" cried Mainwaring.

"I think so, too," echoed Jardine, bending forward and straining his eyes. "Oh, let us but once get in reach of those hounds again!"

The oarsman next to them—the darker of the youths—nodded his head.

"If they stick to the river," said he, in his gentle and musical voice, "we shall row them down, Eh, Paul?" And he looked back over his shoulder at his fairer companion.

The latter bowed his head a little lower in the dimness, and murmured a reply that was not audible to the passengers, as the detective and his assistant might be called.

The dark youth burst into a low laugh.

"That stands to reason," said he, adding explainingly, as he turned his face again to the others: "You gentlemen will have to do the fighting, if any is to be done. That's what Paul means."

"I didn't say that, Ralph," protested the other, a little more audibly.

"It's about what you meant, though," cried Ralph. "And I don't blame you, for fighting with grown-up desperadoes is no more to my taste than to yours."

"We'll attend to that part, should it be on the programme," said Jardine, reassuringly. "I suppose you young fellows belong to one of the boating clubs hereabouts?"

"What makes you think so—because we are so amateurish?" asked Ralph.

"By no means, but just the contrary."

"You find no fault with our 'form,' then?"

"You row superbly."

"Still," interposed the detective, "we are the older and stronger, and might take the young gentlemen's places at the oars."

There was a duet of dissent.

"No, no!" protested the darker youth. "We are still fresh, and can, moreover, hold our own with the best. By the way, sir, are you no worse for your fall back yonder on the bridge?"

His dark eyes glowed sympathetically through the gloom as he spoke.

"None the worse," was the rather abrupt reply. "The villains flung themselves upon me unexpectedly, or the result would have been different. However, but for the tragic fate of that poor fellow who was thrown across the draw in my place—"

He clinched his hands, and came to an inarticulate pause.

"It was horrible," murmured the lad, with a shudder, "inconceivably horrible!"

His companion lowered his head, with something that sounded very like a convulsive sob.

"My friend and I are hard to kill—my friend especially so," Jardine lightly interposed, in order to vary the subject. "Even the spilling of us into the river didn't discompose us to an alarming extent."

"Ah! the overthrow of the pavilion?" cried Ralph. "What a strong man that sailor must be—little short of a modern Samson, I should say!"

"What! you saw it, then?"

"Certainly. Paul and I were looking over the float and under the pavilion."

"And you saw the sailor chap drag away the supports?"

"More plainly than we are seeing you now. Didn't we, Paul?"

Paul nodded an assent, accompanied by his wonted unintelligible murmur, from behind.

He seemed to test the supporting timbers first," continued Ralph, "as if to see which were the most rotten and insecure along the

outer line. Then he suddenly seized two, one in the hollow of either arm, and bowed his head between them, before we could fully realize his villainous intention. Then there was a crash, and the thing was done."

"But how did he manage to escape the ruin he had wrought?" demanded the detective. "That is what I can't understand."

"You would, if you had seen it as we did. The man's back was to the water, and he darted back under the building as the outer edge came thundering down over the float. That was the way he escaped."

"Did he rejoin his chum in the boat immediately?"

"Not at once, but a few moments later. We next saw them after they had deserted their boat, and were flying up the stone steps, with you gentlemen at their heels."

"So. And this boat they are now in is another one, is it not?"

"Yes: a fresh one, doubtless picked up by chance, and a poor tub at that. See; we are fast overhauling them. Let us put on a spurt, Paul!"

This was accordingly done, and very effectively.

The chase had now passed under the railroad bridge, the Madison avenue bridge, and far up the narrowing river, with the majestic arches of High Bridge dimly discernible in the background.

"Give way! give way!" cried Ralph, excitedly. "Keep up this pace, and we shall have them dead in less than five minutes."

The detective and his companion took this opportunity to examine their revolvers, which were found to be in good order, notwithstanding their immersion.

But at this juncture the fugitives, doubtless unwilling to risk a struggle on the water, took to the northern shore, which at this point is bold and precipitous.

The pursuers, however, effected a landing scarcely a minute later, and then the chase was resumed down the track of the New York and Northern Railroad.

The fugitives turned once to fire several ineffectual shots, and then, dashing to one side, disappeared in the direction of a small house perched against the bluff, with the springing bill upon one side and a narrow swamp-plot on the other.

It presently became certain that they had entered this house, which was accordingly investigated, so to speak, by the pursuers with no delay.

Mainwaring and Jardine thrust a spare revolver, each, into the hands of their young companions.

"Are you afraid to use these in an emergency?" demanded Mainwaring. "Can we trust you to stand guard?"

There was a moment's hesitation, but the youths accepted the weapons.

"Yes," said Ralph, answering for both. "At all events, we'll do our best."

Without another word, the young men sprung up the tall steps leading to the rock-perched shanty, and burst unceremoniously into one of the two rooms it contained.

Then their first impulse was to start back in astonishment.

The fugitives were not among the group in the lighted room, but prominent among them were—Mrs. Bentineke, the fat ex-river-pirate of the Mariner's Rest, and her mysteriously muffled companion of the night before.

Regardless of the intruders' drawn weapons, Mrs. Bentineke darted forward, shutting and bolting the door behind them.

Simultaneously, Ralph's youthful voice rung out in warning from outside and below. "Look out! the modern Samson's at work again." And this was followed by the strokes of an ax, which caused the shanty to tremble.

Even the original inmates started up in consternation now.

But the impending catastrophe was past averting.

In another instant the house had turned a complete somersets down the bluff, burying its chimney-stack into the swamp-mud, and kicking the remnant of its timber-supports, like an overthrown giant's heels, into the air.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OVERTHROWN SHANTY.

THIS extraordinary catastrophe was accompanied by several shots outside of the ill-fated domicile, indicating that the youths who had been placed on guard there were exhibiting some sort of activity at least.

This proved to be the case as soon as the detective and his companion managed to scramble out of the capsized crib, which they were the first to do, availing themselves of the cellar door to that end.

Ralph and Paul were then seen to be standing with their backs to a rock, while confronting the wielder of the ax, who proved to be identical with the destroyer of the restaurant pavilion, and was threateningly advancing upon them with uplifted weapon.

He seemed to treat with contempt the pistols which they held, point-downward, in their nerveless hands.

But the two detectives were not slow in let-

ting themselves down the side of the house, and rushing to the rescue.

"Surrender!" cried Mainwaring. "Scoundrel, your Samsonian days are at an end!"

The ruffian backed away from them, whereat the bravery of the youths returned.

They also brought their revolvers to bear, and he was fairly between two fires.

"Give me a show," he growled. "It isn't the square thing."

Jardine laughed scornfully.

"A pretty hound you are, to talk of fair play!" he cried. "Surrender, or your blood be on your own head!"

Here, however, there was a warning scream from the youths, and the detectives were suddenly attacked by the other inmates of the cap-sized house, who had just effected their escape therefrom, and were armed with cudgels and knives.

Without venturing to use their pistols as yet, the detectives managed to keep the new-comers at bay with their drawn pistols, while edging around so as to still cover the man with the ax.

"Upon them!" hissed Mrs. Bentincke, between her teeth. "If these men have not charmed lives, let us prove it now and here. It is our only chance. Kill them! kill them!"

She was armed with a glittering poniard, and her mien was that of a fury.

But the detectives were by no means intimidated by her words, and a diversion in the situation at this moment rendered it yet more interesting.

The fairer of the lads, watching his opportunity, suddenly sprung forward and plucked the ax-wielder by the beard.

It came off in his hand, revealing the features of Carolus Digby.

"So, this is the double-part you play?" thundered Mainwaring, hurling himself upon him. "Villain, your mystery must be solved at last!"

So unexpected was the attack that Digby, in spite of his superior brute strength—which was simply prodigious—was overthrown.

Then (while Jardine still kept the desperate gang at bay) his adversary's knee was on his breast, the muzzle of the cocked revolver at his head.

"Yield, or die!"

Digby looked up coolly at his vanquisher.

"Remember the railroad cut!" said he. "Or have you forgotten how I saved your life there?"

The detective had forgotten it in the excitement of the moment.

He sullenly turned his weapon aside, and partly arose from the prostrate man.

"Still, you are my prisoner," he said. "You shall explain the contradictions of your actions toward me."

A hoarse laugh from the other was his only answer.

In another instant Carolus had shaken off the oppressive knee, sprung to his feet, and the ax was swung aloft in his powerful hands.

"Shoot if you dare!" he yelled. "Curse you! it's my turn now. Surrender, you!"

"Kill them! kill them!" screamed Mrs. Bentincke afresh. "It is our only chance. Spare them not!"

Instantly there was a general rush upon the surrounded detectives, the twolads having again completely lost their nerve.

"Back to back!" sung out the Gliding Detective. "If they insist on cold lead, why, let them have it."

Still it might have gone hard with them, but for help that suddenly came.

This was in the form of Old Newthe, who abruptly rushed upon the scene, apparently dealing destructive blows right and left with his stout cudgel to the extent that the common enemy were speedily put to flight, including Digby himself.

"What, Newthe, old stand-by!" cried Mainwaring, clutching the old man's hand. "You again place me in your debt."

"Don't mention it, sir."

"But how did you happen along here, too, in the nick of time?"

"It's a long story, sir; too long for the present. You must remember, though, that this ain't a plaguey big distance from the scene of your morning's adventure, in which I had the good-luck to figure. However—"

He came to an embarrassed pause, for Jardine had not tendered him any greeting.

Moreover, the darker of the youths was leaning forward, and searching his face with startled eyes.

"The same! the same!" muttered the boy under his breath. "I could swear to it."

Before Mainwaring could comment on the strange scene, Old Newthe had seized his hand, pressed it warmly, muttered a few hasty words, and disappeared up among the rocks.

"Let him go, Guy," said Jardine, coldly. "You will hear from that old hypocrite again when you least expect it. Have no fear as to that."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that he was in collusion with our assailants—that his coming to our rescue was but a sham."

"I think so, too," said Ralph. "I have reason to."

"What reason can you have for distrusting that man, young sir?" demanded Mainwaring a little angrily.

"I have seen him once before."

"When and where?"

"That I cannot tell you—not just now, at least."

Something like groans came to their ears from down the hill.

Proceeding in that direction, they found the groans to be given vent to by the ruffianly old Falstaff of the Mariner's Rest.

Owing to his enormous bulk and weight, he had suffered fatal injuries by a fall down the bluff, and had then been deserted by his fleeing companions.

At this juncture the overturned shanty took fire.

In a few moments it was wrapped in flames, which brightly illuminated the group, and shed their glare for a long distance through the darkness.

The injured man's back was broken, and it was evident that his sands were nearly run.

He particularized the Gliding Detective by a feeble sign, and called out in dislocated sentences:

"I'm done for, mister. But I hadn't no cause to treat you as I did, and I'm sorry for it."

"You shall carry my forgiveness with you, if you'll only make a clean breast of your connection with the gang that are pursuing me so relentlessly," said the detective gravely.

"Can't do that. Honor among thieves, you know. But this I can tell you. I'm not the cuss they played me off onto you for."

"You're not old Tom Grimsby, then?"

"Not by a durned sight. And no relation to that she-devil either, thank God! Bad as I've been, I never got so low as that. But this is nothin'. That missing lawyer what's got the missin' will—"

"Yes, yes!"

The detective was bending eagerly forward, as the moribund came to a gasping pause.

"He—he—is still alive, mister, but crazy—clean gone in his head—an' hidden away in obscurity by that—that she-devil and her husband."

"Where? Tell me where?"

"Old log house—Sleepy—Slee-slee-Sleepy Holler!"

He was dead!

"Come," said the boy Ralph. The fire is attracting a crowd. Many people are hurrying along the railroad-track. Let us be off."

Publicity seemed equally undesirable to all of them.

At all events, they all made a common rush to the place where they had left the boat, and hurriedly crowded into it.

When a few yards from the shore, a stream of water bigger than a man's arm began to spout up through the bottom of the craft.

"Back oars!" called out Mainwaring, stopping the leak as well as he could after a brief examination. "We're tricked again. The villains have scuttled her, and then plugged up the breach temporarily with clay."

CHAPTER XIX.

HIGH BRIDGE.

THE detective's words proved to be the truth. The fine row-boat was hopelessly ruined for future use.

However, a landing was speedily effected without any one getting very wet.

Then, after a brief consultation, the party made their way along up the river, keeping well under the railroad embankment at first, to avoid observation on the part of those who had been attracted to the neighborhood of the burning shanty.

High Bridge was the most convenient river-crossing and they had decided to avail themselves of it.

Arriving presently at the entrance to this lofty structure, they rested themselves as if composing a belated pleasuring party, until a young countryman chanced along on his return from the conflagration, when Mainwaring took it upon himself to question him.

"What building was it that burnt?" he asked.

"A deserted shanty, where a railroad hand murdered his wife last year," was the graphic reply.

"No one was living there at this time, then?"

"Well, not exactly, sir. But a man and woman rented it about three weeks ago, and they do say there's been queer doings there since."

"What sort of doings?"

"Irregular comings and goings—meetings of strange gangs now and then—mysterious goings-on, you know. Some set 'em down for counterfeiters, others for forgers, but every one was afraid of 'em."

"How did it catch fire?"

"By turning upside down."

"You're joking."

"No, I'm not. It was that teetery on the bluff-side that a big wind might blow it over, for that matter."

"But there has been no wind to-night."

The rustic scratched his head.

"Well, she burnt up, bottom up, all the same, anyway. That wasn't the worst of it either. They've found a dead man at the foot of the hill."

"A dead man?"

"Yes, boss; and a mighty fat dead man, at that. He might have hired out to old Barnum, and taken the belt. Haw, haw, haw! Mebbe he set fire to the roost before breaking his back-bone. But nobody knows nothin'."

He was not questioned further.

"Another link in the conspiracy!" said Mainwaring, turning moodily to Jardine, after the countryman had passed on. "The shanty has doubtless been used as a secret rendezvous by Mrs. Bentincke and her male accomplices ever since the Rose Hill murders."

Jardine nodded.

"What do you think of the scrap of information furnished by the dying fat man?" he asked.

"Much may be made of it, scant as it was. I used to be partly familiar with Sleepy Hollow—up in Westchester, near Tarrytown, you know."

"Good!" said Jardine. "A systematic search for the missing lawyer in that locality ought to be next in order."

Mainwaring was about to answer when his attention was attracted to his young companions by the excited interest they were manifesting in the conversation.

This was especially noticeable of Ralph, the darker lad, who had been listening with painful eagerness.

"My young friends," said he, with quiet kindness, "it is perhaps time that we should know more of one another. My friend and I are private detectives, on dangerous duty bent."

It was an invitation to confidence that was not accepted with avidity.

"We've had proofs enough of your being on dangerous duty," said Ralph, with a smile. "And now we are going home—alone, too; that is the worst of it."

And he exchanged an uneasy glance with his fairer companion.

"Ah!" observed Jardine; "perhaps your mother doesn't, know you're out, then?"

"Mine doesn't, at least," replied Ralph, gravely. "because I haven't any."

"What! you are not brothers, then?"

"No, sir; nor in any way related to each other, though our homes are not far apart."

"We're not of age yet," Paul said, in a low voice. "We are not used to being out so late at night."

This was so artlessly said, and the timidity avowed was so unusual in American lads of even tenderer age than the youths appeared to have attained, that both the young men smiled, perhaps a little pityingly.

However, they offered to escort the lads as far as their home.

This offer, after much hesitation and some private consultation, was finally accepted.

"Still," suggested Mainwaring, as the party proceeded on their way, "you young gentlemen might confide in us as to who and what you are."

"Might, but sha'n't," said Ralph, laughing—"at least for the present."

"That settles it," observed the detective, good-naturedly. "So let us be moving a little more briskly."

This was acted upon, the magnificent flagged promenade over the immense water-mains of High Bridge being rather conducive to brisk walking, especially by night, with little of the fine surrounding scenery to distract one's attention.

Still, the night had turned fluctuatingly dark, with only occasional glimpses of the moon and stars.

This, together with the somber loneliness of the hour, and the consciousness of the great depth of the river-gorge under their feet, tended to render their progress more uncertain than it might otherwise have been.

"Not since my boyhood have I crossed High Bridge before," said Jardine, reflectively, as the party approached the middle of the bridge. "The great mains were not bricked over then. People had to walk down below between them, and I remember that they were much higher than a tall man's head."

"High Bridge was not such a pleasure resort then," remarked Mainwaring.

"How high is it?" asked Ralph.

"A hundred and sixty feet above the river at low tide, if I remember rightly."

"It is one of the highest viaducts in the world, is it not?"

"I don't know about that. High enough, though, and dangerous enough, too, to daunt most of the professional jumpers, I believe. You see—"

He was abruptly interrupted by a knot of shadowy figures suddenly springing into the path from an angle of the parapet.

With only this much warning, the party were once more attacked before a weapon could be drawn.

"Back to back!" was once more the Gliding Detective's war-cry, as he knocked down the foremost assailant with a stunning left-hander, while reaching for his revolver. "It's the same

old gang ambuscading us. Stand fast, my hearties!"

The fight at once grew fast and furious, notwithstanding that the detective group were outnumbered more than three to one.

Mrs. Bentwicke did not offer to take an active part on this occasion, but stood by quietly, only occasionally prompting her followers, and seeming grandly statuesque in the uncertain light.

But the two boys, who had retained the pistols lent to them, began to pop away with them, showing thereby an improvement on their previous timidity, though aiming for the most part over the assailants' heads.

The two detectives were also doing effective work, though likewise loth to use their firearms.

But odds would, nevertheless, have prevailed, if Old Newthe had not once more mysteriously appeared upon the scene, bringing his redoubtable single-stick powers into play.

This he did with such vim and vigor that the ruffians were beginning to beat a retreat, notwithstanding the taunts and jeers of their woman-leader, when an unlooked-for incident again seemed to place the advantage in their favor.

Carolus Digby, who had thus far kept his gigantic strength in the background, suddenly sprung upon Mainwaring like an avalanche.

The latter, as has been seen, was nothing like his match in sheer brute strength, though fully his equal in skill and courage.

After a brief but tremendous struggle, he was overborne.

The next instant he was carried to the ridge of the parapet, and it became sufficiently evident that his powerful antagonist was endeavoring to hurl him into the yawning abyss.

"Hang on to him, Guy!" yelled Jardine.

"Hang on!"

At the same time he fired, but his aim, being disturbed by the fear of hitting his friend, sent the bullet wide of its intended mark.

As for Ralph and Paul, they seemed to have become suddenly paralyzed by the peril of their chief leader; leaving Luke and Old Newthe to do all the work in keeping the assailants still at bay.

Then there was a double shout, a double yell.

The two men were seen struggling for an instant on the extreme edge of the parapet.

Then they toppled over, disappearing into the abyss.

CHAPTER XX. MASKS AND FACES.

A CRY of horror had broken from the assailants, no less than from the beset party, with the single exception of the woman, who had remained motionless and silent.

Then they were seen in general flight, back along the bridgeway toward the Westchester shore.

A squad of policemen were charging upon the scene from the opposite direction.

This explained the sudden panic that had taken hold of the ruffians and their woman leader.

Jardine rushed forward, and quickly explained something of the nature of the attack to the roundsman heading the charge.

Four officers were at once sent in pursuit of the fugitives.

Those remaining, two in number, accompanied the youths and Jardine, the whole party losing no time in reaching the foot of the bridge on the New York, or rather the Manhattan Island, shore.

Old Newthe had once more effected one of his occult disappearances.

A swimmer was just crawling out upon the turfy bank of the river.

It proved to be the Gliding Detective.

He shook himself in a manner to indicate that he was but little the worse for his plunge.

Then he modestly accepted the congratulations of his friends, and shook hands with the officers, with whom he chanced to have a personal acquaintance.

"Where is the other one?" asked Jardine.

"Dead, like enough," was the reply. "At all events, we went down in a death-lock, and he struck the water first—back foremost."

"That ought to have broken his back," said Jardine, cheerfully. "Let us hope that it did."

But here one of the policemen pointed out over the gloomy water.

A man was seen climbing up into a patch of moonlight on the opposite shore, and the inference was strong that it was none other than Mainwaring's desperate antagonist.

"That fellow is the strongest man I ever got in the grip of," commented the detective, slowly, as the party began to retrace their steps to the head of the bridge. "He seems made of steel wires, and there is a peculiarity in his wrestling-grip that is unique in its way."

The roundsman, a veteran officer, looked up interestedly.

"What is its peculiarity?" he asked.

"I don't know as I can describe it accurately. But it seems as though, when his hold has been taken, there was a sort of bunching out of each wrist into a solid knob, that digs bruisingly into flesh and bone as if made out of solid granite."

The roundsman slapped his leg.

"I know him!" he ejaculated. "There is but one criminal who, to my knowledge, ever possessed that wrestling dodge, and this chap must be the same."

"Whom do you refer to?"

"To Crackman Charley—a professional burglar, once a shining headlight in the old Tom Grimsby gang, but of late years lost sight of."

"Hallo!" exclaimed Mainwaring. "More daylight, and it's welcome enough!"

He then began to tell the officers as much of the complicated case in hand as he thought it prudent for them to know.

While thus engaged, a touch on either hand attracted his attention.

Paul, the fair youth, had touched his left hand, as if to assure himself of the man having really escaped his last deadly peril, and then drawn back, as if startled at his own temerity.

The touch on the other hand was Ralph's, and it still lingered there, while the lad's great black eyes dwelt with grave earnestness upon the face that was for an instant kindly turned toward him, in acknowledgment of the sympathetic feeling that was proffered.

Arriving at the head of the bridge, they met the rest of the squad, who had just returned from an unsuccessful chase.

"They can run better than they can fight," grumbled one. "Even the old gal at their head could discount a professional runner on a long race, in spite of her long skirts and toggery."

"I propose securing a carriage," said Ralph, at this juncture. "There ought to be some hotel-stables near here where one can be procured, and Paul and I propose to pay for it."

No objection was offered to this proposition, and, after some difficulty, a coach was obtained.

Ralph gave the driver his directions in a low voice, and the party of four were soon on their way back to Harlem, a locality in which the lads had already stated that they likewise resided.

"I suppose I ought to feel exhausted by to-night's unusual events," said Ralph, "but it is not so with me. Perhaps it is the excitement of it all that keeps me up."

"That will also tire you when you have grown used to it," Jardine took it upon himself to reply. "In what part of Harlem do you young fellows live?"

"After we have been driven there, you gentlemen can give the driver your own directions," said the lad, evasively.

"You are non-committal enough, if you are lively in other respects," was Jardine's rather discontented comment.

The lad made no reply, and after this hardly the exchange of a dozen syllables before the destination was reached.

"Why, it is Rose Hill!" exclaimed Jardine, in undisguised astonishment.

Then Mainwaring awoke to a similar sense of amazement.

The lads had tripped out of the coach, paid the driver, and then slipped into the garden, where they appeared to be waiting.

As the truth suddenly flashed upon the young men, they were not slow to take the hint, and follow them.

The driver whipped up, and disappeared, with a sleepy good-night.

As the young men were entering the great gate, a graceful figure slipped out of its shadows and confronted one of them.

It was the French maid, Justine, and it is needless to add that her appearance left Mainwaring free to proceed into the garden unattended.

The pretended boys were standing in the full moonlight, with bowed faces and nervously-working hands.

As the still astonished detective advanced, the fairer, with a face on fire, and disregardful of his imploring gesture, broke away in a species of panic, and disappeared in the house.

Issie, however—the reader will have suspected her identity ere this—stood her ground, though still with averted face.

"It's no use my trying to express my surprise," Mainwaring blurted out. "I'm not equal to it."

"Don't try, then. But confess that our parts were acted with some degree of cleverness."

"Indeed, they were! What could have induced you to such a masquerade?"

"First tell me do you deem it an immodest one?"

She took off her yachting hat as she spoke, causing her raven hair to shower in ringlets down over her shapely shoulders.

For the rest, her admirably-fitting costume of dark navy blue was anything but immodest, notwithstanding its masculinity, and for all that it betrayed the robust maidenliness of her perfect figure to the most charming advantage.

"By no means," replied the detective, gravely. "It wouldn't be so much a question of modesty as of propriety—to say nothing of its unlawfulness."

"Confess, though, that our masquerading has stood you in good stead to-night."

"I am glad to confess it! And I ask again, what could have prompted you to assume it?"

"A knowledge of your approaching peril."

"Of course, I am once more, and infinitely, a debtor to yourself and Lois. So is Jardine. But how could you have foreseen our peril?"

"I shall tell you that, and much more presently. Will you wait here for me?"

"With all my curiosity!"

He might have said "heart," instead of "curiosity," and she was perhaps disappointed that he did not, as she flitted away into the house.

The detective seated himself wearily in a convenient rustic seat.

As he did so, two lurkers in the shrubbery on either side, probably unconscious of each other's vicinity, surveyed him with furtive looks.

One of these lurkers in the shadow was Reuben Calthorpe, Lois's father.

The other was the strange character who has become known to the reader as Old Newthe.

CHAPTER XXI.

ISSIE MAKES SOME REVELATIONS.

WHEN Issie returned, which she did very quickly, it was in her own proper self, and so strikingly beautiful that the detective could scarcely suppress an ejaculation of praise for it, accustomed as he had become to the many fascinating phases to which her beauty was susceptible.

A gown of soft, clinging material and snowy whiteness, in keeping with the continued sultriness of the night, was relieved by a rich lace mantle, coming down over her head and muffling her fair throat, where it was fastened by a magnificent diamond pin.

Diamond drops also glistened at her ears, and the entire effect was a combination of richness and simplicity that was in perfect keeping with the Spanish beauty of her face and figure.

The detective, however, merely bent his head in silent recognition, as she sunk into the seat at his side.

"Now," said she, with her dazzling smile, "as to how Lois and I became apprised of your impending peril?"

"Yes; that's it."

"Well, this time it was Lois whose fortune it was to make the first discovery."

"And yours, as a matter of course, to take the first decisive step?"

Her melting look was eloquent of her gratitude.

"I think I may say that I took the initiative, but, without the information as first made by Lois, such a step would have been impossible."

"What did she find out?"

"That your enemies were constantly on your heels—that it was hoped to startle you out of your lodgings in some way, then follow you to the Harlem River, and then and there contrive just some sort of disaster that did befall you there."

"How could my very thoughts—my unexpressed intentions—have thus been forestalled, or rather foreseen?"

"I do not know."

"But was the preliminary event of my being nearly burned alive in my bed likewise predicted?"

"Merciful heaven! no. Did such a thing really precede your Harlem River adventures?"

"It did." And the detective related the terrible incident in detail.

After he had finished, the young woman remained silent, clutching her hands in a sort of terror.

"Now what I can't understand is just this," continued Mainwaring. "How could my intentions, with regard to proceeding to Harlem River with Jardine, have been foretold by any one before they were formed in my own mind—in other words, before they were intentions?"

"Had you not expressed them before quitting your lodgings, directly after your narrow escape from that bed of fire?"

"Perhaps so—that is, very soon after it, and to Jardine."

"Ah! then there would have been time—that explains it. It sometimes occurs to me that she can think like the lightning, and move like the wind."

"To whom do you refer?"

The girl's dark cheek crimsoned.

"To my—to Mrs. Bentwicke."

"Ah, things are becoming a little less mysterious. It was, then, through overhearing some immediately subsequent conversation of that arch she-devil, Mrs. Bentwicke—By my life, I beg your pardon, I lie!"

"Go on, sir. Can the truth be other than the truth?"

"Well, then, it was by that means that Lois overheard the discussion of my intentions, and their predicted outcome?"

"Not at first hand. It was through a conversation between her own father and Carolus Digby that she overheard."

"Heavens! could Mr. Calthorpe sanction such a plot?"

"On the contrary, he advised against it to the extent of his courage. But he is under the scoundrel's thumb."

The detective reflected.

"You think, then," he continued, "that, subsequent to my escape from the burning couch, Digby had had time to communicate with Mrs. Bentineke before the conversation that was overheard between him and Mr. Reuben Calthorpe?"

"Scant time, but doubtless enough. There is no other way to account for the time given us to interfere."

"True; well?"

"Well, as soon as Lois had learned of the disaster preparing for you she came rushing to me with the appalling information. Our boating experience of the preceding night had emboldened us, but we had to think of going disguised as we did. Our costumes were at hand—the same that we had briefly worn a year previously in a girlish freak at our riverside place up the Hudson. We had to use the utmost dispatch to be on hand at Harlem Bridge in time, but we succeeded. The rest you know."

"I do, indeed, know the rest. But for that both my friend and I would now be dead—victims to the malignity of those plotting fiends! You heard what the roundsman said with regard to Digby?"

"Regarding his identity with Cracksman Charley?"

"Yes."

"Of course, I heard it, and was not greatly surprised."

"The clever scoundrel has doubtless, therefore, been in secret league with your—with Mrs. Bentineke from the first."

"Doubtlessly so."

"Issie, have you known of this from the beginning?"

"I have suspected it."

"I am going to question you remorselessly."

"You have my permission."

"And your answers?"

"Shall be the truth."

"I believe it."

"Thank you."

"That album in which I detected the adventurer's picture?"

"It was truly Mrs. Bentineke's—let us speak of her by that name when possible."

"Willingly. How long have you known that woman (since your childhood, I mean,) as your mother?"

"Since the first day of her entrance into this household."

"She secretly declared herself to you as such at the outset?"

"Yes."

"The relationship was never suspected, then, by your adoptive father?"

"Never, or she would not have been tolerated in the house a single hour."

"I shall not question you about what you may know as to the assassins of Mr. Calthorpe and Ichabod Taylor."

Issie's face had become set and pale; but her rejoinder was unlooked-for by the detective.

It was this:

"I insist that you shall do so, and at once."

"Still—"

"I will have nothing deferred, Guy; I will not have my feelings spared one hair's breadth, I insist!"

"No wonder that you have taken the lead in your adventures with Lois."

"Why?"

"You are so brave and resolved."

Her rejoinder was another surprise to him, though it was given calmly, and with no present trace of passion.

It was this:

"I love you. You are my husband. I shall never yield you up, or surrender my claim in that regard, while I have life. As for the truth in other things, as in this, I have nothing to fear, though much, infinitely much, to blush and weep for in the actions of others. But if my parents are unprincipled criminals, it is only my misfortune, not my fault. I take this position, and shall never be induced to abandon it a single hair's-breadth. Pray, proceed with your questions."

These words were impressive.

There was a sad dignity in their manner and utterance which, allied with their simplicity and the speaker's youthful beauty, seemed to carry conviction with them.

The old haunting doubt became rife in Mainwaring's mind.

"If she be really my wife," he thought, "should I not be the prouder of her for those brave, tie-defying and firm words? Ah, could I but know, could I but know!"

He waited until he had thoroughly recovered his cool self-control before proceeding.

"I shall take you at your word," he went on at last.

"Do so."

"You have not, in the remotest degree, been accessory to those murders?"

"Before man and high Heaven, no!"

"Do you suspect their author?"

"Now I do."

"What do you suspect?"

"That the crimes were planned by Mrs. Bentineke, and executed by her husband—my own father."

"To what end?"

"To the end that has been virtually attained—that I might inherit, and they through me share, the old man's wealth."

"How long have you suspected this?"

With a shudder.

"Almost from the first."

"And yet you have conveyed no hint—you have endeavored to divert suspicion from that course."

"Was it not natural—nay, merely human—that I should do as I have done?"

He could not but bow his assent.

"Loathe them as I may," she continued, "renounce them as I may, are they less my flesh and blood?"

"I am not censuring you."

"Besides, remember this: To no one else would I make the admissions I have made to you. I would deny them point-blank in a court of law, and under oath. Excruciating torture should not tear them from me."

He bowed again.

"I make them to you because you have the right to demand them—because the cries of flesh and blood are as nothing to the devotion I owe to you—to the devotion that, trample and deny me as you may, shall cease but with my life—because you are my husband!"

He did not bow in response to these words, but sat looking at her intently, as if he would read her very soul.

CHAPTER XXII.

ISSIE'S MAGNANIMITY.

THUS far, he felt convinced, Issie had told him the truth, the entire, unvarnished truth, and nothing but the truth—and at what a cost, at what a sacrifice to the pride and feelings that women are wont to hold most dear!

Her words were corroborated by what Mrs. Bentineke herself had admitted, though in such a different spirit.

Why, then, should he not accept her claim upon his credulity in the more personal issue?

Was it more vital to her to admit that she was not his wife than to admit the horrible criminality of her own flesh and blood?

Yes; something told him that it was so, in just the same measure as a woman's emotional life is paramount to her intellectual nature.

"I admit the truthfulness of everything that you have thus far told me, Issie," said Mainwaring, after a long pause.

"Thank you," coldly.

"In fact, your words are borne out by the previous confession that your—that Mrs. Bentineke made to me."

She looked at him in amazement.

He had not recounted this much of his adventure as a preliminary to his being fastened in the jaws of the devouring tide.

"What! she—she made such an admission to you?"

"Yes."

"Then it is more than she ever made to me. When and how did she make it?"

"When my life was apparently in the hollow of her hand, and she consequently felt herself perfectly secure in making it. These are the words she used."

He repeated them.

"That was less prudent than I deemed her," was Issie's sole comment.

"Now let me go on."

"Do so."

"You have suspected your—this woman all along, and from the very first?"

"Yes."

"And yet you did not hint as much to her?"

"I dared not—I feared her admission of the truth of my suspicions. I loathed her for them, and was yet trying to give her the benefit of the doubt. Can't you understand that?"

"I think I can. But one thing more on that point."

"What is it?"

"Before she so thoroughly unmasked herself as to break with you, were not your relations with her most cordial?"

"They were not," this with a barely perceptible hesitation.

"Pardon me, but on the occasions when I saw you together, it struck me otherwise."

"Superficially, we were mother and daughter—that is, in secret. Radically, we were otherwise. We wrangled often—had many quarrels. My own maid would bear testimony to that."

"Your own word is sufficient," this after a reflective pause. "Now, to go further."

"Proceed."

"Had you seen your—your father before the murders?"

"No; and I have seen him but once before to-night—of course, I mean since my adoption by Mr. Peregrine Calthorpe."

"That is understood. But what is this you tell me? That you have seen him to-night?"

"Yes."

"What! in the course of our still fresh adventures?"

"Yes; and once before."

"When was the first time?"

"He was the mysterious stranger whose conversation with my mother I overheard here in the garden, which enlightened me as to your peril on the rock."

"So."

"Yes; I am satisfied now that that man and my criminal father are one and the same."

"And you saw him again to-night?"

"Yes."

"But the unwieldy ruffian whom we found dying while the overturned shanty was burning—he declared with his dying breath—"

She interrupted him with an impatient gesture.

"So you really believed that that man was my father—was old Tom Grimsby?"

"He had been passed off upon me as such."

"And you actually believed it?"

Mainwaring had already suffered considerable self-humiliation on this score, and yet more was in store for him.

"Who is your father?" he exclaimed, half-desperately.

"He whom you call Old Newthe."

The response was a quiet one, but it might have been in thunder tones, from the effect that was produced upon the detective.

He clutched the arm of the rustic seat, and then sat as one petrified.

Amazement and self-contempt made up the sum of his agitation.

"You don't mean it?" he gasped.

She pitied him so much that she merely bowed her head gently.

"Great Lord! how I have trusted that scoundrel—how thoroughly has he hoodwinked me! Jardine was right in distrusting him from the first, and so was my original intuition right in loathing and fearing him. But Winkerton has been equally gulled with me. In fact, but for his insistence I would never have given the man the chances to hoodwink me as he has."

He seemed to derive a dreary species of consolation in these reflections.

"Think no more of that," said Issie, with renewed gentleness. "The best of detectives have doubtless been temporarily duped ere this."

"But Mainwaring, the Gliding Detective, never before!" he continued, with undisguised mental anguish. "You are more merciful than I deserve, Issie. Well, well; let it pass."

"What more would you ask me?"

By a great effort, he thrust the still smarting sense of his mortification behind him.

"I will proceed. You cannot blot out the fact, Issie, that you have benefited by Mr. Calthorpe's death?"

She regarded him with a peculiar look.

"You, then, have ceased to believe in the 'later will'?"

"Apart from my belief, the only will extant bequeaths you everything."

"Granted; but might I not even rejoice that it is so, without having desired my adoptive father's death?"

There was something simply human and rational in the way she said this.

The detective felt himself to have been ungenerous, and colored.

"Wait!" said Issie. "I must bring you something from the house."

She again disappeared.

While she was gone, one of those lurkers in the shadow stealthily drew nearer to the waiting detective.

It was "Old Newthe."

His face was now like a fiend's. A gleaming dagger was clutched in his bony hand. Once he raised it over the young man's back, as if determined to plunge it to the hilt in that human sheath.

Then he smiled, shook his head, and as the young girl came flitting back from the house, he again melted into the shadows.

Issie laid before Mainwaring a piece of writing.

"What is this?" he asked.

"The rough, first draft of a letter written and sent by me to my legal adviser yesterday. Call upon him, and he will corroborate what I tell you. Read it."

The detective did so.

Then he sprang to his feet in undisguised admiration and respect.

"Noble woman!" he exclaimed.

The letter briefly ordered her legal adviser to ask for the admission of the will to probate on the distinct understanding that the property devised was to be shared equally between the chief legatee and the testator's niece, Lois Calthorpe, daughter of Reuben Calthorpe, Esq., of Rose Hill Manor-house.

Issie was turning white and red by turns.

"You then approve my letter?"

"Approve it? It is the acme of generosity and magnanimity!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MOMENTOUS INTERVIEW ENDED.

THE detective returned the letter to her with a low bow.

Then he resumed his seat at her side.

"Let not the subject of the will be mentioned between us again," said he in a low voice.

He almost feared to raise his eyes to hers again.

After what had happened, he mistrusted his own strength against her combined beauty and nobleness.

He feared to believe in her as his wife—to be-

lieve in it against his own convictions—lest he might clasp her to his bosom then and there, for better and for worse forevermore.

"You wish to ask me something else?"

"Yes; if you will kindly permit it."

"Say on."

"The mystery about this adventurer, Digby, troubles me."

Again that flash of disappointment across the dark loveliness of the perfect face!

Had she once more hoped for the more personal question as to the doubtful marriage?

Perhaps so.

But she was thoroughly herself again so quickly that he could not have remarked the change, though now looking steadfastly at her once more.

"A superficial scoundrel and profligate!" she exclaimed, contemptuously. "He has no mystery."

"You recollect him as having been connected with—with the Grimsbys in the past?"

"Indistinctly. I was but four years old at the time."

"Ah, to be sure. But you have recognized him all along since he has been visiting here?"

"I have."

"And have known of his designs upon Miss Calthorpe's hand?"

"Yes."

"And you—pardon me, Issie, if I wrong you by the question—you would have permitted them to be consummated, could an interposition of yours have prevented?"

She confronted him with flashing eyes and a quivering lip.

"I would *not* have permitted them! And you *do* wrong me—you insult me—by the question!"

She buried her face in her hands.

He was faltering his contrition when she stayed him by a gesture.

Then there was a tearless reproach in her face as she raised it, but the look was also a forgiving one.

"I would have hindered such a consummation," she went on, more calmly, "at any cost to myself, Guy—at the cost of my life—at any cost but one!"

"And that would have been?"

"Yourself! You alone I would not have given up to save her—as I would not, even to save myself."

The simple womanliness in her answer was indisputable.

His embarrassment was extreme, but he mastered it.

"I believe you, Issie."

Then, after another long pause, he went on.

"But I insist there is something incomprehensibly contradictory in that man's actions."

"I can't agree with you."

"How then compare his persistent pursuit of my life with his magnanimity in saving my life at the risk of his own in the railroad cut?"

"There is no comparison—no contradiction either, for that matter."

"Why?"

"Your assailants at the cut-crossing were doubtless ordinary footpads, having no connection whatever with these systematic pursuers of your life."

"That is possible."

"And Crackman Charley saved you under a sudden impulse without having first identified you. He doubtless regretted it deeply enough the moment he brought you up out of the cut into the moonlight."

"I wish I could think that way."

"You can if you try."

"But is he the man to give way to such sudden, or generous, impulses, at the risk of his life."

"Where danger is to be confronted, or his massive strength to be called forth, yes. That is, I think so."

The detective thought again.

"I believe you are right," said he, after a pause, "and I am glad to be able to believe. But there is one thing more that is puzzling."

"What is it?"

"Mrs. Calthorpe's ridiculous attempt to kidnap me through the cave under the summer-house, and this fellow's part in it."

"Depend upon it, Digby's part in it was not so innocent and farcical as he would have you believe."

"How do you explain the thing?"

"In this way. Mrs. Calthorpe is a very vain, and a by no means profound, woman."

"Every one knows that."

"Well, Digby was right enough as to the comparative innocence of her motive. But, depend upon it, it was either Mrs. Bentincke or she who first suggested it to her."

"What then?"

"Well, it would have been their care, had they really carried you off, that the result would have been more serious, if not positively fatal, to you than had been within the scope of the poor woman's intention."

"You are wiser and more analytical than I."

"Thank you."

"Then there are all these actual rescues of me from apparently desperate situations on the part of Old Newthe, as I shall still call him for the present."

"I confess that his actions are also unaccountable to me, knowing as I do the absolute deadliness of his nature. Still—"

"Still what?"

"His rescues were necessarily make-believes, doubtless to make surer of you at a more propitiously murderous time."

"Ah!"

"For instance, he made no sign to save you from your fate on the river-rock."

"But was he there?"

"Undoubtedly. He was the mysteriously muffled figure at your woman enemy's side in the boat."

Mainwaring struck his forehead.

"Ah! But no more of him. My next move shall be to take him into custody, and I only hope that he has no suspicion as yet of my eyes having been opened. And that will be a good one on Mr. Winkerton, too! It would be a splendid thing to be able to slip the handcuffs on his scoundrel-protege in the chief's very presence. How *he* would stare then!"

"Still, you haven't caught him yet."

"No; that is to be seen to."

Then the detective gave her a quiet, inquiring look.

"I mustn't forget—"

"I know precisely what you would say."

"Say it for me, then."

"Those two are none the less my flesh and blood. That is what must not be forgotten."

He only stared.

"You consequently would know whether or not I would interfere to save them from your detective-clutch—if I am to be trusted, as against my criminal kin. That is what must be made sure of."

He colored.

"Issie, you are a sorceress. I confess that you have spoken my thought."

"Good, then. And you may rest assured."

"Of what?"

"That I shall do nothing, either the one way or the other."

"How?"

"That, if I do nothing to hold your hand, neither shall I do anything to surrender them into your hands."

"I understand. And with your nobleness you could do no less. I am unspeakably your debtor, as it is."

"Don't refer to that again, please."

There was another interval of silence—this time, a long and final one.

He was then about to rise and hold out his hand, when she stopped him.

"You—you have nothing more to ask me, then?"

"No, Issie; you have already so generously enlightened me—"

He paused as he perceived the changed look in her face.

Then he began to understand what she meant, and he fell back uneasily in his seat.

But she was resolved to have her own say, else she felt her heart must burst.

"You believe me truthful in everything that has this night passed between us, do you not?" she falteringly asked.

"I do—more than truthful!" A little doggedly.

But she was not to be gainsayed.

She opened wide her glorious arms with a desperate gesture, her face crimsoning, her bosom heaving.

"Oh, then," she cried, "why should you believe me false in aught else. Guy Mainwaring, I am your wife!"

Intellectually, no less than emotionally, her argument was incontrovertible.

The detective's senses reeled.

It was too much.

The next instant he had caught her to his breast.

But it was only for an instant.

Her exultant face had hardly been raised from the intoxication of his embrace ere he tore himself out of it.

"I cannot!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "God forgive me if I err! but in this one thing I cannot believe!"

Then he rushed away, like one pursued by devils.

She had sunk back, and was sitting there like a beautiful carved image in the moonlight.

That last glimpse of his grief-torn face had been a sufficient, a final, revelation for her.

He did not, could not, never would love her!

CHAPTER XXIV.

TEMPTER AND TEMPTED.

THEN a cry burst from her lips.

A low, wild, desolate, maddened cry.

"I am without hope!" she moaned. "Ah! were it not for *her*—"

She gnashed her teeth, and then a settled deadliness of purpose replaced her desperation.

She was about to rise when she encountered—her father's eyes.

He was bending over her, demoniac fury in his glance, the gleaming poniard in his clutch.

"I have overheard everything," he hissed.

"Nance, prepare to die!"

But, after the first start, she had met the ad-

partition, that might so well have appalled her, with an unblenching gaze.

"I don't doubt it, father," was her calm reply. "Murder is altogether in your line. Why don't you strike?"

He only glared at her. He might have forgotten her fearlessness as a little child in the crime-stained home that her infantile beauty had once brightened. At all events, he had been unprepared for her sublime coolness now.

"Why do you hesitate?" she went on. "Am I less helpless than the man-nurse when you stabbed him between the shoulder-blades? Or would you prefer forcing poison down my throat, as you did with my poor benefactor? I am ready, I tell you."

"It is false! Girl, traitress! mine was not that double-deed. I can swear to it!"

She laughed, scornfully.

"Still you must die!" he went on. "It is necessary. Otherwise am I lost, and your mother, too."

She coolly threw back her head, tore the lace covering from her throat and breast, and regarded him with something positively beseeching in her glance.

"I swear to you that I desire to die!" said she, slowly. "I am desperate, miserable, lost! If you hate me, or if you love me, strike!"

His fury was unabated, and yet was he mystified.

"Mad as you are," he muttered, "you shall have your desire. Have no fear as to that."

"Fear? I tell you, I crave the stroke. Be quick, then. You say that my death alone can save you. Good God! it alone can save me. Otherwise, I too may become an assassin!" She shuddered. "I swear to you that intending murder was in my heart at the instant of your providential appearance. Be quick, and make sure! Otherwise it will revive, and I be lost, body and soul."

"What mean you?"

"It matters not. Strike, I tell you! Wretch as you are, I shall bless you—you will earn my forgiveness by the stroke!"

He burst into a harsh laugh.

"Forgiveness, and from you! Ingrate witch!"

"Ah, you are a coward, a cheap bully, father! But, come now; get yourself together. Remember how dangerous I may be to you. I may put the very rope around your neck. I may—"

Without another word he seized her, and the dagger once more flashed aloft—this time mercilessly.

But it did not descend. The prayed-for death-stroke was turned aside.

"Stop! move but another finger, and you are a dead man!"

The words and interposition were Mr. Reuben Calthorpe's.

Old Newthe—Grimsby, the river-pirate—slowly released his too-willing victim, and lowered his hand.

"What have you to do with it?" he growled.

But Mr. Calthorpe still presented, as at first, his leveled revolver at the hoary scoundrel's chest, and did not lower it until the dagger had been put out of sight.

"Now go!" He pointed the way out of the garden. "And forget not that I shall remain on guard here henceforth throughout the hours of darkness."

Grimsby had recovered his composure. Without another word he turned and stalked away.

Issie had remained seated, and was now calm.

Mr. Calthorpe waited till the retreating footsteps died away along the adjoining street, and then turned to her severely, while putting up his weapon.

"Yet another eavesdropper!" remarked the young woman, contemptuously. "It is well."

He put aside her words with a gesture.

"What aid you mean by courting death at those criminal hands?" he demanded, sternly.

"What did you mean by saying that, otherwise, you also would become an assassin?"

"Who gave you the right to question me?" was her sole response.

"I have overheard everything."

"Much good may it do you. But I am mistress here, sir. I desire to be alone."

He hesitated.

The man was a born gambler—a moral slave. But he was not incapable of good.

"I shall do as you bid me, Issie," he stammered. "But I was in hopes, from what I overheard, that you, or perhaps Mr. Mainwaring—"

"Might relieve you of the thralldom to which Digby subjects you."

"Yes, yes; that is it. How the deuce did you know what I wanted to say?"

"Marvelous penetration on my part, truly! If I live, you shall be freed from the scoundrel's clutches. I give you my word to that. Now leave me."

He obeyed without another word.

She listened till assured that he had quitted the garden and entered the house.

Then her former access of rage, which had been interrupted by her father's appearance, gradually possessed her afresh.

The intervening incidents were as a blank.

She only remembered Mainwaring's departure—his grief-torn face as he sped away was

once more before her eyes, striking anew the bleak hopelessness to her heart.

And with this was the image of her blonde rival.

"Ah, but for *her*!" she repeated; "but for *her*!"

The set deadliness was again in her face as she arose, drawing the lace mantle once more about her neck and breast.

Then she flitted into the house, wholly unconscious of her every movement being dogged by footsteps as stealthy as her own.

As Issie glided through the darkened corridors of the old mansion-house a small dagger was clutched in her hand.

She paused before a curtained chamber, noiselessly pushed aside the partly opened door, and entered.

It was Lois Calthorpe's sleeping-room.

Disrobed, statuesque in her slumbering beauty, the young girl was extended on the snowy-couch, motionless in the flooding moonlight, save for the soft undulations of her "tender-taken breath."

Her lips were slightly parted, the melancholy of her waking hours had passed, something like a shadowy smile was on the lovely upturned face.

It was partly supported by a curved arm of alabaster shapeliness; her other arm fell over on her side, the hand clasping a photograph.

The face of the picture was clearly betrayed by the moonbeams.

Issie's settled deadliness of aspect received a demoniac addition as she recognized the pictured face.

It was Mainwaring's.

This was the temptation, surrendered to at last, from which she would so gladly have been saved by her criminal father's avenging death-stroke.

The sight of the picture spurred her jealous fury to the full.

It was not only maddening, but also a revelation, to her.

Lois had, since her belief in Mainwaring's entrapped marriage with Issie, covered her sufferings ably.

Even Issie herself had come to believe that her rival's passion had at least cooled, if it had not been wholly conquered.

And here was the damning evidence to the contrary—his pictured image in the lovely hypocrite's sleeping hand, his living image in her dreaming heart.

Issie for an instant hovered over the sleeper like a veritable genius of murder.

But she hesitated as she flashed the tiny weapon aloft—hesitated, and then returned it to the concealment of her bosom.

No; she must not shed her victim's blood. Like Othello over his Desdemona, she must kill, but not brutally, not bloodily.

But here the comparison ended.

Unlike Othello, her compunction was wholly selfish.

She would do this deed in secret, without leaving an incriminating blood-mark, else how should she escape the after-suspicion, and claim her lover wholly for herself.

More secret means!

Othello-like once more, she softly possessed herself of the companion pillow to the one in which the sleeping head was nestling.

That would be admirable—perfect.

Two minutes' pressure of that fluffy, downy ball, with her strong hands down over the unconscious face would be enough.

CHAPTER XXV.

"GET THEE BEHIND ME, SATAN!"

THERE would be a struggle—convulsive efforts—vain pantings; but all this would soon be over.

The man she worshiped would no longer be swayed by a counter, a superior fascination in this beautiful blonde face—it would be an image of the past—after that he would resist no more—he hers forever!

She raised the pillow softly, but determinedly, over the unconscious face.

Then came the reaction, the revulsion.

There was a cry, the pillow was flung aside, the young girl was clasped in her would-be murderer's arms.

It needed only this much for Justine, who had stealthily tracked her young mistress thus far, to slip away to her own room, with thanksgiving at her heart.

Lois had started up with such amazement as can readily be imagined.

"What is it, Issie?" she exclaimed. "It is still night—why are you here?"

"Ask me not!" this through a tempest of sobs and tears. "But you are saved, Lois, you are saved, and so am I! That is enough, God be praised!"

"Saved from what? There is no danger here."

"Danger! Ah, my God, if you knew what you, what I, too, have escaped! But it is ended—the demon is under my feet, not over my head, with his red hand clutching at my soul, to drag it down to hell! And listen, Lois. We must adventure not again in each other's com-

pany. It would not be right—it would not be safe! Go to sleep again. Never mind my wild words. There, there; God bless you and guard you!"

And then, with a parting sob and kiss, she had flown from the room like a hunted thing, leaving the mystified Lois lost in vague speculations as to this extraordinary behavior.

Midway back to her own room, Issie had come to a panting pause under a small window of one of the corridors.

She was still haggard from the terrible self-contest, and yet with a sort of virtuous triumph in her face.

A woman's slipper and a folded paper caught her attention lying on the moonlit floor.

She curiously examined.

The slipper she instantly recognized as belonging to her maid, and it was yet warm from the wearer's foot.

The letter was one of many that the French girl had received from her lover, Luke Jardine.

A single sentence caught Issie's eye with just sufficient distinctness in the imperfect light.

Then she guessed all, at least so far as Justine's latest espionage was concerned, besides suspecting more.

Willing enough to have her own wild thoughts diverted into another channel, she hurried on to her room.

There she lost not a moment in lighting her lamp, when she read the letter without an atom of scruple.

To other eyes it would have been unimportant enough; to hers it was a revelation.

After indulging in a flood of compliments and rhapsodies, the love-letter contained the following:

"But my friend Guy is growing morose and impatient with me. My adorable Tinie, it is all owing to your irresolution in the matter we know of. He is half a madman until the torturing issue of the doubtful marriage shall have become settled one way or the other. In vain I tell him that you, in return for my love and affection, will ultimately make a clean breast of what you secretly discovered on that eventful night. In vain I encourage him to believe that it was as he hopes—that Lois, and Lois alone, will prove, in the light of your promise to me, to have been truly made his wife on that occasion. He swears that you are too slow, that if you have anything to divulge, you would have told me ere this," etc., etc.

She crushed the letter in her hand, then smoothed it out beside the tell-tale slipper, underneath the lamp.

Was it for this that she had thrust the tempting spirit of murder behind her back?

All this was a fresh and unexpected blow.

For the first time the knowledge that the jewel-secret of her soul was shared by another, came upon her.

The frightful calmness—the settled deadliness of purpose—had repossessed her features.

She swept like an accusing spirit to the door of her maid's room, which was within easy call.

It was ajar, and its occupant was disrobing before her mirror.

There was all of a Frenchwoman's coquetry in the task, but her face at the same time was contented and happy beyond what the mere story of her looking-glass, charming as it was, might have evoked.

But as Justine caught the reflection of her young mistress's face beside her own, she turned with a little scream.

Always rather afraid of Issie, she had never but once before perceived so terrible a look upon her face.

That was in the garden, but a short time before, just before her flitting into the house, in search of her rival's sleeping form, and with possible murder written in its wreathing lineaments.

"Ah, heavens, mademoiselle! what is it? What brings you—might you not have rung or called?"

"Come!"

Her mistress beckoned, and she followed her whither she led as obediently as a lamb.

The moment Justine's eyes rested on the slipper and letter her pallor increased and she clasped her hands.

"Ah, mademoiselle, I confess it—I *did* follow you to the young lady's chamber. But I meant it for the best—I wished to save you from yourself—I had caught a glimpse of your face—"

"Was it more terrible then than now? Peace, fool! Look!"

She thrust the letter before the young woman's eyes.

Then Justine understood.

For an instant her trepidation was painfully increased.

Then she was her calm, observant, quick-witted self.

"It is from my lover." She blushed quite naturally. "He is enthusiastic and foolish. But I am not ashamed you should have read his heroics over me, mademoiselle."

"Dare to trifle with me further, and you are lost—I will kill you! Look, read!"

She sternly indicated the paragraph that has been quoted.

But Justine, now with her duplicity restored,

was equal to the occasion, though not a little terrified.

She burst into a laugh.

"It is my tricking him, mademoiselle. I swear to you that I know not a secret you possess. Might you not have guessed it, mademoiselle? As if the murderer of monsieur and his servant could be known to me, and I carry such a secret with a smiling face, a careless behavior—"

Issie gripped her wrist so hard that she cried out, and then the delicate dagger once more glinted menacingly in the disengaged hand.

"Continue this trifling at your peril!" she hissed between her grinding teeth. "You know what that paragraph refers to, and so do I."

"Is it mademoiselle's marriage to Monsieur Mainwaring, then?"

"You know it is that."

"But, mademoiselle, on my life, I protest—"

"Beware!" Issie's black eyes were searching the other's with a gloomy and menacing gaze. "Now tell me just how much you *do* know!"

"Nothing, mademoiselle, nothing. I swear it! That is— Oh, mercy, mademoiselle, mercy!"

The knife was raised, the smoldering fire in those gloomy eyes was absolutely remorseless.

"Look you, Justine, I must know just how much you know of that night's business. I *will* know it—otherwise you die!"

"Mercy, mademoiselle, mercy!"

"Listen, and remember that your life hangs on your answers to my queries. Where were you upon that marriage night?"

"Ah, mademoiselle ought to remember that. In my own bed, with a sick headache, as mademoiselle had given me permission to be."

"Then you did not see Miss Lois return, in a dazed way, at eight o'clock, and retire to her room?"

"Before Heaven, I did not!"

"You were not on the watch—you did not see me slip into her room after she had laid down and fallen to sleep?"

"Ah, what is it you say? I never heard of this till now. I have been merely pretending to my lover—pretending to a secret knowledge that I do not possess."

Her mistress suddenly released her, and pushed her away.

"Go!" she said. "But henceforth your peace of mind is at an end. Henceforth you are my slave—eternally under my watchful eye!"

"Does not mademoiselle believe me?"

"No; but that is not here nor there. Henceforth I distrust you—you are my slave. Attempt to escape—to cast off my watchfulness—and I will kill you! Go!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A FRESH QUEST.

IN fleeing so frantically from Issie's presence, the Gliding Detective had been followed and overtaken by Luke Jardine, who had been waiting with Justine, as we have seen, at the garden entrance.

"What has happened?" demanded Luke. "You look like a phantom!"

Mainwaring would hardly pause an instant, though he was making a great effort to recover his calmness.

He confronted his friend wildly.

"Everything has happened!" he cried. "You were right about Old Newthe's treachery for one thing. He is in reality old Grimsby. Be on the lookout for him. Meet me at the agency in the morning. Good-night, old fellow. I cannot think or talk now."

He wrung Jardine's hand, and hurried away.

After his experience in his burning bed, the Gliding Detective had no longer an inclination for his accommodations in the McGinty household.

He therefore sought the nearest public house, which chanced to be the Mount Morris Hotel, where, such was his physical exhaustion, he soon found relief from his mental worryment in profound slumber.

Thoroughly recuperated, he made his report to Mr. Winkerton in the morning, and then asked if Old Newthe had made his appearance at the office as yet.

"Not yet," was the reply. "But you ought to keep track of the old fellow better than I, Mainwaring."

"I only hope he'll not forget to report, as usual."

"Why shouldn't he? You find him worth having about, eh?"

"So much so," said the detective, gravely, "that I wouldn't miss seeing him again for the world. Please tell him so, if you see him before I do."

"All right," and the chief rubbed his hands delightedly. "Aha! but don't I know how to recommend a good man on occasion?"

"You do, indeed, sir—after your own fashion."

And Mainwaring added to himself: "But won't I cut the comb of your self-conceit, if I can only slip the bracelets on the old rascal's wrists in your august presence?"

"How is the Rose Hill case?"

"Blooming and booming. Another week will settle it."

"A big feather in our cap, if it should, for

the public and the newspapers are already waxing sarcastic."

"It's the police that are getting salted, not us."

"So much the better if we win. Where do you go next?"

"Up in Westchester county. I am on track of the missing lawyer and the later will."

"Hal the old superstition. As if there were any later will!"

"We shall see, sir."

Here a private messenger brought Mainwaring a note, which read as follows:

"Old Newthe has taken the alarm. He overheard our entire conversation last night, and furiously confronted me after you had gone. ISSIE."

The detective ground out an expletive between his teeth, but there was no help for it now.

On his way down the stairs he met Jardine, and showed him the communication.

"That is bad," was the latter's comment. "But we must make the best of it. Where are you going?"

"To Sleepy Hollow."

"Aha! I understand. Had I better go with you, or remain?"

"I was just turning that over in my mind."

"On the whole, perhaps I had better remain. I also have just received a delicate intimation. Here it is."

Luke Jardine's private communication was as follows:

"MON CHER:—You must marry me right away, immediately, or my secret can never be at your service. Mademoiselle suspects my knowledge, and from this moment I cannot ever say my life is my own. I thought she would kill me; but, as it is, I am simply her slave, her victim, unless you rescue me from her jealous jury. JUSTINE."

"The deuce!" said Mainwaring, handing back the missive.

"What do you think?"

"That Frenchy doesn't exaggerate a bit. I can imagine her life no bed of roses, should Issie's suspicion of her fidelity have been thoroughly aroused."

"But I don't mean that. I mean, as to my going with you, or remaining here."

"Let me think. Could you make it a runaway match, and marry her off-hand, as she suggests?"

"I could, but wouldn't like to."

"Why—since you love her?"

"That is just the objection. My family are highly respectable, and I would like to introduce her first, as my affianced, in due form."

"Still, could you overlook the objection, would an instant marriage with Justine expedite her promised confession, think you?"

"I think not—perhaps just the reverse, I am afraid."

"Pray give me your reasons."

"Justine is no less shrewd than affectionate. She would have me dead then, and might think she could afford to take her time about the confession—especially if it is to 'give away' the mistress whom she holds in both fear and respect."

"Good! the marriage is not to be thought of."

"Would it do to carry Justine off to my sister's house, to relieve her of her mental distress?"

"By no means. Issie would take the alarm at once, and our difficulties might be doubled."

"What do you suggest, then?"

"Let me think again. The girl is a good diplomat, I should say?"

"None better."

"Able to pretend her innocence of any secret knowledge of her mademoiselle's affairs successfully?"

"Thoroughly so."

"Good enough! Let her remain where she is, and you come with me."

"You advise that?"

"Candidly. The separation may do her good, as well as hurry up her flagging resolve regarding the confession."

"It might do that."

"You're sure of her attachment, aren't you?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Let it be as I advise, then. Rose Hill itself will be all the more promising for obtaining a few days' rest on our part."

"Still, I would like to say good-by. It would look more decent, you know."

"Of course it would. Meet me at the East Tarrytown station of the New York and Northern Railroad to-night at six. I shall be a laborer looking for work on the new aqueduct, under the name of Tom Smith. You will be a Jersey street contractor, for whom I formerly worked, and anxious to get me back again—say a Mr. Jones."

Jardine nodded, and the friends separated.

On the afternoon of that day, the pseudo Tom Smith was roving restlessly amid the romantic vistas of Sleepy Hollow, apparently in search of work, but really with his eyes open for an old log house.

Primitive as this storied region has remained in many respects, log-houses are not numerous within its confines, and the search bade fare to be a tedious one.

At last the detective drifted back to a rude drinking-shanty, already visited, in the vicinity of one of the shafts.

"Hallo, friend!" called out the landlord, as the wandering workman laid down his nickel for a glass of beer. "Back again, eh?"

A rather discontented nod was the reply, and the beer was slowly ingurgitated.

"No work yet, eh?"

"Not a stroke."

"I told you, you remember, how it would be. Italians are so dirt plenty for this pit and tunneling work, that a clean, honest American workman, as you appear to be, can't get much chance with the contractors. Killin' hard work, too."

This was said in a lowered tone, as a number of tough-looking characters, mostly Italians, and nearly all more or less drunk, were lounging around the bar, and the adjoining rude piazza.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT THE AQUEDUCT SHAFT.

"I AIN'T afraid of hard work, boss," said the pretended laborer, in a purposely loud tone, "an' I ain't never been afraid of it."

"Well, just hang around here a few days," said the saloon-keeper, genially, "and I may be able to put you on to something or other."

He had already noticed that the new candidate for deep-shaft employment appeared to be fairly supplied with money, and the detective knew without the telling that he would be as welcome as the flowers of May as long as the cash lasted.

"I wouldn't care so much," continued the latter, ordering another glass of beer, "if I wasn't made game of."

"Who's been making game of you?" said the proprietor, not without sympathy, as he supplied the demand. "It sha'n't be done, if you make up your mind to take up board here with me. Who's been doing it, I say?"

"A stranger back yonder at Whitson's. At least I think he was only foolin' me."

"What did he say?"

"Directed me to an old log-house, somewheres hereabouts, where he said he thought I might get odd family jobs till something better might turn up."

"Oho!"

"You may well laugh, mister. The idea of a log-house within fifteen miles of Spuytenduyvil! But I've been lookin' an' lookin' for it just the same till my feet are blistered."

"Yes, and you'd have kept on looking without finding. There's no log-house hereabouts."

"Yes there is, though, begging your pardon, mister," said a man, starting up from a bench near the door. "There's just one, and it's back under Buttermilk Mountain, less than a mile from here."

The speaker was a smooth-faced, Hebraic-looking young man, of somewhat better appearance than his associates, with a quick eye and an easy tongue.

He seemed half-laborer and half-sport, and was in reality just what the disguised detective set him down for at a glance—a gambling rogue and shark, living as opportunity offered upon the vices and weaknesses of rougher and less intelligent men.

But this did not prevent the pseudo Tom Smith from hailing the young man's interposition with delight.

"You're the man I want to see," he called out, boisterously. "Come, and have a drink."

"Thanks! but then—ah!—I've a friend with me, you see."

"Fetch him along. The beer's good, and perhaps the whisky is better."

The friend proved to be a rather secretive-looking German peddler, alongside of whom the younger, smooth-faced fellow had been sitting.

He obsequiously accepted the invitation, carefully carrying his pack with him to the bar, and setting it close to the foot-rail.

"What sort of a crib is this log-house, stranger?" asked the detective, while the first glasses were being discussed.

"I don't know much about it, to tell the truth," said Smoothface, a little thoughtfully.

"But a pal of mine, whom I'm expectin' here any minute, knows it better."

"De log-house ish knowed as Gimball's, ain't it?" put in the peddler, sipping his beer as gingerly as though he never expected to get another at some one else's expense.

"Kimball's," corrected Smoothface. "Yes; that's the crib, Cohen."

"Ah, I haff peen dere."

"Perhaps you can tell me what kind of a place it is, then?" said the detective, turning to him.

"I should radder shay so, young mans. De lasht unt only dime I vas dere I vas kicked out off de door-yart, unt de pull-tog sicked onto me."

Smoothface burst into a laugh, in which Tom Smith and the landlord joined.

"Strangers aren't much wanted around the Kimball's," said he. "Some sort of mystery about the new-comers there, they say. Fritzzy, hand over the bones. Mebbe this gent would like to chuck me for the cigars."

"With all my heart, for one," assented Tom Smith; and the dice were forthwith produced.

"I neffer blays for monish," was the decided comment of Mr. Cohen, as he retired to his bench, with his peddler's pack in his jealous grasp.

The dicing progressed from that time on, Tom Smith, for the most part losing with an unbroken regularity that could not but greatly increase Mr. Smoothface's complacent self-satisfaction.

"Rattle, rattle, rattle! Yes, my pal Billings has some business on the sly at the log-house, and may put you onto something now. A nickel a throw is poor sport, though."

This from Smoothface.

"Rattle, rattle, rattle! Double the stakes, if you say so. But if there's really any mystery at the log-house, I mayn't like to be mixed up with it, you know. Lost again, by Jingol!"

This from the pseudo workman.

"Rattle, rattle, rattle! Mysterious, mebbe, but nothin' crooked, I guess. Double sixes for me! But your luck may change, you know."

"I hope it may. Rattle, rattle, rattle! So there's a weak old man the strange folks are looking after over there, eh? Trays and a deuce! Durn such luck!"

"Never mind, I'm only a dollar or two ahead so far, Smith. Rattle, rattle, rattle! Oh, I reckon the old invalid wouldn't be in your way. I'm still a winner."

"So your pal is a little on the queer himself, eh? Rattle, rattle, rattle! Of course—yours again, by jimminy!"

"I hope you're not weakenin'. Rattle, rattle, rattle! Yes, betwixt you and me and the door-post, Billings and we ain't afraid of taking tough chances for a big haul. Three fives! Hold on; you're not getting uneasy?"

"Not by a big sight! Play for what you like. So your friend might introduce me as a sort of wet-nurse for the old man, you think? Rattle, rattle, rattle! What beastly luck!"

"Stand fast, old fellow, and you may best me yet. Yes, and you might help at the queer, too, but don't let the peddler overhear you.—Rattle, rattle, rattle! Sort of monotonous for you. I must confess."

And so it went on.

And at last Smoothface, elated highly, and who, of course, had been cheating from the outset, flung down his entire winnings, several dollars in all, and bantered the other for a final toss to that amount.

The latter had by this time obtained all the information he wanted.

"I'm your man," said he, after a moment of pretended hesitation, and he put up a like amount.

Then he quickly won the stakes with as much ease as he had been theretofore losing them, and pocketed the money.

Smoothface brought his fist down upon the bar, with a furious oath.

"Don't swear, young feller. What do you say to doublin' 'em up ag'in'?"

"Not much!"

"Well, then, what'll you drink? Come along, Mr. Cohen."

The drinks were accordingly set up afresh.

A crowd of rough men had been watching the game, thus unceremoniously brought to an end, and these, together with the saloon-keeper, now regarded the wandering workman with increased respect.

Presently the latter felt a nudge.

It was from Smoothface's elbow. He had recovered his equanimity, and, leaning against the bar with his hands in his pockets, was contemplating the disguised detective in a speculative way.

"What is it?" asked the latter, as he was led to one side.

"Sit down," whispered Smoothface, confidentially, and they appropriated one of the remotest benches. "I say, you're a thoroughbred."

The pseudo workman smiled behind his false beard and eyebrows.

"I try to do my best," said he, quietly.

"What's up?"

"Are you ready for a snap?"

"Yes."

"We're going to do up the Johnny Peddler."

"Oho! Who else is into it?"

"My pal, and he ought to be here before this."

"Is he a good 'un?"

"Tip-top."

"What's the racket?"

"Cohen has got loads of boodle, hidden away, innocent like, among his wares in that pack of his."

"I'm glad to know it."

"Besides more about his clothes."

"How do you know?"

"I've been piping him off for three days, off and on."

"Well, what else?"

"More'n that, he's an old thief himself—but on the sneak, mind you."

"That ain't my sort."

"Nor mine, neither. That's why we're laying for him. Will you go into it?"

"If it's safe, yes. But mind you, I've been jugged before this, and—"

"We've got the thing dead, I tell you! But hello! Here's my pal."

The detective looked up.

Then he gave a slight start as he recognized the powerful disguised ruffian, whose embrace had just been boisterously hailed by all hands.

Smoothface's pal was none other than Carolus Digby, *alias* Cracksman Charley.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VILLAINOUS CONFEDERATES.

"If you're on our lay, why are you looking for hard work among these aqueduct suckers?"

The question was on the part of the newcomer, Billings, and he was studying our detective with a sternly critical eye.

The pair, together with Smoothface, were now in private converse, while Mr. Cohen was opening his pack and displaying his wares to a noisy group on the opposite side of the room.

"I'm looking for the main chance," was the collected reply.

"You call yourself Smith, eh?"

"For the present."

"Who was it told you of the log-house?"

"A stranger at Whitson's."

"What did he look like?"

"It's none of your business. But I'm only here to stand cross-examination, as a matter of course."

Digby, *alias* Billings, *alias* Cracksman Charley, laughed.

"I rather think you'll do."

"Didn't I tell you so?" put in Smoothface, pettishly. "Dash it all a cove that can beat me at doctoring dice must be a good 'un."

"Be easy. Nothing like making sure. I say, Smith, it's at the log-house we propose to do up the peddler."

"The deuce! that suits me!"

"I'm glad of it."

"You can recommend me for the old duffer's companion at the same time."

"That's so—if I make sure of you."

"Is there anything worth nabbing at the log-house?"

"It's not to be nabbed, if there is—don't you forget that!" this with due severity. "The Kimbells are my friends."

"Now you're talking English."

"Good!"

"But ain't you rather shaky on peddlers in general?"

"Why should we be?"

"One was found murdered in a brook near here, and the authorities may be wide-awake. I read of it in a Jersey newspaper last week."

"You're out. It wasn't a peddler."

"No?"

"No; but a chap from City Island, who had strayed up this way on a spree. Peddlers are still good."

"I stand corrected, Mr. Billings."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Smith."

"See if you can't give me a few particulars."

Digby reflected a moment, and then slapped the other on the knee.

"We'll take our chances with you," said he.

"You can do that every time."

"The racket is this: Cohen imagines that the queer ones in the log-house are rich. He's wild to get in there with his wares, and for what he can pick up. See?"

"Who couldn't, now?"

"Well, I'm going to introduce him this evening."

"First rate."

"If you say so, I'll take you over first, as a flyer."

"Still better."

"Are you sure you'll like the job?"

"So far, yes; but I never go in on a blind."

"It's as plain as rolling off a log. The Kimbells are in with us, of course, but aren't to appear so."

"That's reasonable. How many of 'em are there?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Kimball, and a servant, for the present?"

"For the present?"

Cracksman Charley laughed.

"There's been various Kimball families in the log-house, one after another. They're always Kimbells, and they're always my friends. But this last lot of Kimbells, only recently arrived, are my particular friends. Understand?"

"Better than the country folks round about do, I hope."

"Nothing is known, and nothing is suspected."

"Who's the imbecile old gent that I'm supposed to be looking after?"

It was asked in such a careless way that but a single penetrating glance was looked from the adventurer's suspicious eyes.

"That isn't here nor there," he answered, a little sharply. "He is the Kimbells's private affair. Don't forget that, mate."

"I'm not forgetful, as a steady thing."

"Good! Can you go over with me at dusk this evening?"

"Over to the log-house?"

"Of course."

The detective glanced at a cheap clock that hung over the bar.

"Yes," said he, rising. "It's a go. I think I can make it in time."

"Make what? You're not going?"

"I've got to—first."

"Where are you off to?"

"To Whitson's station."

"Eh?"

"Yes. A contractor I once worked for in Jersey City may be inquiring for me there."

"What for?"

"Because I once robbed him. But you're deuced inquisitive!"

Of course, this reply did not tend to allay the inquisitiveness complained of.

"Going to see the man you robbed!" exclaimed both rogues in a breath. "Here's a go!"

Mr. Tom Smith pulled down a corner of his eye, and grinned.

"It's a Mr. Jones," he exclaimed, softly. "I robbed him, but he had already robbed his employers, and I was his messenger. See?"

"Not exactly."

"Then you're blind. I rather suspect he's got another job in view, and can therefore afford to be forgiving. Now do you see?"

Whether they did or not, they laughed their assent.

"It's several miles to Whitson's," said Digby, starting up. "I'll drive you over, if you say so."

The proposition was eagerly accepted.

A few moments later the detective and Digby were on their way in the latter's hired turnout, Mr. Smoothface having been left behind, to continue the piping off of Mr. Peddler Cohen, as he would have called it.

By the time Whitson's was reached the good understanding had been so far cemented between the precious pair that it was resolved to rob Mr. Jones with no less cheerfulness than it had been decided to 'do up' the unfortunate peddler.

"I hope he isn't easy to smell a rat, though," said Digby.

"Leave him to me, and look out for yourself," was the reply. "That will be enough."

"But do you think we can induce him also, to put up over night at Kimball's."

"Yes; if you keep cautious."

"Oh, don't fear for me. Are you sure he'll be fixed?"

"He's always fairly loaded with lucre—that is, to the extent of a few hundreds, you know."

"Will he fight?"

"On occasion, I think he will. But I don't propose giving him the chance."

Digby laughed, and laid on the whip afresh.

"Of course, he'll be all right, if he takes things reasonably," said he, with a jocular air.

"But if not, he'll have to take the same track with Cohen."

"Look here; I want to know for certain about this thing."

"What thing?"

"Do you anticipate murdering the peddler, or not?"

Digby whistled softly, and flicked off a fly with his long whip.

"That depends. Why do you ask?"

"Because if murder is intended, I drop the thing right here. That's decided!"

"Is it?"

"You bet."

"You talk like a fool, Smith."

"In what way?"

"Do you really suppose I'd let you back out now?"

"Tut, tut! You couldn't hinder me."

"We're in a lonely place just now."

"What of that?"

"And I'm quicker'n lightning and stronger'n a bull."

"That's nothing."

"Isn't it? Suppose I should decide to withdraw my confidence from you at this moment."

"What if you should?"

"Why, I could get away with you in a flash!"

"Try it on—for a joke."

The muscular scoundrel took him at his word, joking or no joking.

Dropping reins and whip, he suddenly turned upon his companion with a brow of thunder.

But it was only to receive the muzzle of a revolver, thrust into his mouth, by a counter movement even swifter than his own.

Cracksman Charley's brow cleared.

He politely spat out the end of the pistol, slapped his companion heartily on the back, resumed the whip and lines, and burst into an approving laugh.

"You'll do, Smith! I see you have been there before."

The detective laughed no less pleasantly, and put up his shooting-iron.

"I always try to look out for the main chance," he modestly repeated, and the journey was resumed without further interruption.

Farce so far as it went, the incident had, nevertheless, not been devoid of a spice of seriousness, that set them both reflecting.

"There he is! There's Mr. Jones!" exclaimed the pretended Tom Smith, as they drove up to the station.

Digby looked the individual carefully over, and an introduction was speedily effected.

"Mr. Billings here is to be fully trusted, Mr. Jones," said Smith, after certain preliminaries had been exchanged. "You can speak right out before him."

This was accompanied by a significant glance, which the disguised Jardine well understood.

"Oh, well, I suppose it will be all right," said the latter, hesitatingly. "You see, Tom, I've got a good thing on hand, and I purpose letting bygones be bygones. What do you say?"

He was got up as a well-to-do looking business man, plentifully darkened and whiskered—a disguise that Mainwaring had voted a success the moment he set eyes on him.

"What's your good thing?" asked the pretended laborer, a little surlily. "If it's like that last job of ours in Jersey City, you can count me out—if I did get the better of you in it."

A yet more significant glance was given with these words.

For one so young, Jardine was a marvel at grasping a situation intuitively.

He pretended to fly into a rage.

"Curse you!" he exclaimed. "Wasn't your swindling me enough, without your boasting about it?"

"I wasn't boasting."

"Come, come, now, gentlemen!" persuasively interposed Billings, "this will never do, you know."

"Oh, it's all right," said Smith, brightening up. "What's your racket, Jones?"

"It's something to do with an insurance office—but not in this neighborhood, of course."

"Just so. Well, Billings here is going to get me work at a queer house, where there's also a racket on foot. You can stop there over night, if you say so, which will give us a chance to talk things over."

"What kind of a place?" asked Jones, doubtfully. "Is it a hotel?"

"After a fashion," struck in Billings, with a laugh. "And a rum sort of hotel at that. You'd better come. There's room for three in my wagon, or we'll manage to make it."

This was agreed to, after a little more hesitation, and the party were soon on the road again.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LOG-HOUSE.

DURING the drive back to the shaft-tavern, the two detectives managed to increase the understanding between them, seemingly without their companion being any the wiser.

At the tavern word was left for Smoothface to fetch along the peddler an hour later, and then the log-house was reached a little before dusk.

The detectives were not altogether unprepared to find the Kimbells represented by Mrs. Bentinecke and Old Newthe, or, in other words, by Mrs. and Mr. Grimsby.

"Here's a man I've brought to look after the uncle," was Digby's brief introduction of the Gliding Detective. "And I hope he'll suit. My other friend here is Mr. Jones, who wants to pay you for supper and a night's lodging."

This was accompanied by a swift sign, which, however, did not escape the attention of the detectives.

The host and hostess of the log-house—a rambling old structure of great size and many apartments—were at once all smiles and courtesies for Mr. Jones.

Toward the pretended workman they were, naturally, more reserved, as was perhaps proper toward an intending servant.

"Supper'll be ready in ten minutes," said Mrs. Bentinecke, rubbing her hands. "Be seated, Mr. Jones. We're not accustomed to receiving transient boarders, seeing as we haven't always been so poor as now, but we'll do our best. Mr. Kimball, will you order Dorothy to take up the supper?"

Old Newthe, as we shall still have occasion to style him, had been studying the Gliding Detective's face in a manner to make him feel uncomfortable, so that his withdrawal to the adjoining kitchen was appreciated in the sense of a relief.

"When is Mr. Cohen coming?" asked Mrs. Bentinecke, turning to Digby.

"In an hour, or so. He won't want supper, but will expect to stay over night."

"And welcome! But will he have something in his pack worth showing?"

"Of course."

"Well, I do hope so for I'm out of everything in the shape of notions and trimmings, and so is Dorothy."

Then, turning sharply upon Tom Smith, who had remained standing in assumed embarrassment, she asked:

"You, there, do you know what employment you're wanted for?"

The detective pulled his forelock, and scraped his foot.

"My name's Tom Smith, ma'm. Yes, Mr. Billings was good enough to explain."

"Oh, he was, eh? Well, have you had any experience in nursing and looking after silly old persons?"

"Yes, ma'm." Promptly, and even with an air of pride.

"Ah, indeed! and where?"

"In the Ward's Island Insane Asylum."

"So you were there?" A little more interestedly.

"Yes, ma'm. I was one of the most trusted and valuable keepers."

"Have you recommendations from the authorities there?"

"No, ma'm."

"How is that?"

"I was dismissed."

"What for?"

"For breaking a crazy butcher's ribs, knocking down another patient with a flat-iron, and turning the hot water hose on a lot of loonyticks what wouldn't stop peepin' into the laundry."

"Dear me!" with a softened air. "And they discharged you merely for such things?"

"Yes, ma'm! but"—gloomily—"there ain't no appreciation of live merit in these here public institutions."

"Well, I hope you'll answer our purpose, Mr. Smith; only you must not be too strict in your discipline. Remember that."

"I'm just a suckin' turtle-dove, ma'm, and that's a fact."

"We have a patient here—an unfortunate relative of ours. We always speak of him as Uncle. Do you think you can make him happy?"

"I'll answer better when I've seen him, ma'm. Where is he?"

"Mr. Kimball!" bawled the hostess, at the top of her lungs; "send in Uncle."

"All right!" from the kitchen.

Then a sound of curses and scuffling blows, after which "Uncle" put in a meek appearance.

A seedy, scared-looking little old man, with watery eyes and a shuffling gait, but, at the same time, with something cunning and secret suggested by his general appearance.

The Gliding Detective instantly recognized him as Mr. Fieldman, the missing lawyer, with whose photograph he was familiar.

He at once lumbered across the room with a rolling gait that was at diametrical variance with his naturally gliding step.

"How are you, Uncle?" he roared, with a demoniac grin that was meant to be an ingratiating smile. "I'm to look after you. Do you think you'll like me?"

There was a weak smile and some mumbled words as the newly-installed keeper lumbered back to his former position.

"Oh, yes; we'll get along nicely together, Uncle," he vociferated across the dividing space. "I'll make you happy. All you've got to do is to obey me. Understand?"

Uncle chuckled and looked hazily content.

"Mark me now—look me straight in the eyes, I say. There: that will do. Now—sit down in that chair at your elbow!"

The voice was like a war-trumpet, the accompanying glance like a locomotive's headlight.

But Uncle evidently still took it for a joke; at all events, he only snickered again, without budging an inch.

The new keeper crossed the floor with a bound and a howl.

Then all that was visible of Uncle was a wind-mill resemblance of legs, arms, bald head and coat-tail as he was whirled this way and that, up and down, underfoot and overhead, in the model disciplinarian's frenzied grip.

"Hurrah!" applauded Old Newthe from the kitchen doorway; "this is something like. Now we are getting along!"

"The next time Smith had better bring a club," jocosely suggested Digby.

Mrs. Bentinecke merely looked with dignified approval.

As for Jardine, he would have been horrified, had he not known that it was all merely a clever make-believe, without imparting any actual injury to the apparent victim.

Uncle was at last set upon his feet, looking, so far as hair and clothes went, as though he had passed through a stone-crusher.

"Now will you take a seat in that chair?" yelled his new keeper.

"Yes, sir," was the gentle reply; and Uncle sat down without demur.

"Do you see that?" triumphantly exclaimed the conqueror, turning with a glow of pride to the spectators. "How is that for a starter?"

"I reckon you'll do," said Old Newthe; and the others were not less decided in their approval.

"I guess Uncle and I will now take a leetle promenade," said Smith.

And, procuring the little old fellow's hat for him, he clapped it on his head, like a snuffer on a dying candle-wick and led him out by the ear.

The house was picturesquely situated in a wild and lonely glen at the back of the mountain, and not far from a small pond, at the upper end of which was an abandoned tunnel-shaft of immense depth, which, however, contained no water.

Once wholly out of sight from the house, on the border of the pond, the detective's manner completely changed.

"I say, Mr. Fieldman," said he, in the voice which he knew so well how to make musical and persuasive, "I hope you didn't think me in

earnest, the way I carried on with you back yonder."

To his utter astonishment, the old man, after drawing a trembling hand across his forehead, looked up with a perfectly lucid expression, and replied, most collectedly:

"I knew you weren't in earnest, sir; and I feel sure that you mean to be kind to me."

"Hallo! What is this? Let me look at you!" and his companion paused to survey him critically. "Why, man alive, you're not crazy."

"Of course, I'm not!" a little pettishly. "I'm only—only—" the dazed look partly returning—

"Look here, mister, I wonder how I came here, and where I came from, anyway. I seem to be in a nightmare, and—and—" clutching his stomach convulsively—"oh, mister, how it hurts."

"What hurts—your stomach?"

"Yes; that is, I suppose so," and once more the wandering went tremblingly over the poor eyes, which thereat brightened afresh. "*Peste! peste!* am I dead or alive? But I say, mister"—this in a hoarse whisper, and with a half-fearful, half-confident air—"I say, mister, could you procure me a little opium, do you think—just a little bit, so as it is opium?"

The request was accompanied by a wildly hungry look, together with a famished working of the thin lips.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MOON-STRUCK LAWYER.

THE detective had been studying his eccentric companion intently.

For immediate answer to his appeal, he suddenly clapped him on the back, and gave vent to a joyous exclamation.

"What is it, mister; what is it?" asked the old man timidly. "I haven't done anything wrong, have I? You won't tell those Yahoos back yonder that I begged for opium, will you?"

"Hurrah! That I won't, my dear, poor man, depend on it. And you shall have your opium within a dozen hours, if I know myself. But that isn't it—that isn't it, my hearty!"

"Oh, that isn't it, eh?"

"Not a bit of it."

"What's up with you then, mister?"

"Why, I understand your case, and I'm going to make a new man of you. So cheer up, Mr. Fieldman."

"What's the matter with me, then?"

"Why, you're not crazy at all. You're merely a temporary opium wreck, with your memory paralyzed."

"Oh, is that it? But I say, mister, can you get me one dose of the drug—just one little dose?"

"Not now, but you shall have it to-morrow, if love or money can procure it. Now listen to me. Try to fight off that dazed look. Brighten up again, just as you were. There; that's better. Now try to answer some questions that I mean to put to you."

"You'll get me the opium to-morrow—you won't forget?"

"You shall have it, I tell you."

"Then I'll try my best."

"Now then, how long have you been here?"

"I don't know."

"Can't tell how long?"

"Days, weeks, months, perhaps years—I can't tell."

"So bad as that, eh?"

"What is so bad? What the deuce are you talking about?"

"Never mind. These two persons who are keeping you here—"

"The Kimballs?"

"Yes, the Kimballs. Did they fetch you here first?"

"Yes; that is—well, I don't know."

"But they haven't been with you here much?"

"No; there were others. They only came last night. I don't know. Don't bother me."

"One minute. If you had the opium, could you remember better?"

"Ah, my God! give me but that."

"You shall have it, I tell you. But will you be able to remember better after that?"

"Yes, yes; all will be clear then. But now—" Again he put his hand to his eyes.

"Let us change the subject. What is this great hole we have come to?"

"The mouth of the bottomless pit. Come away from it."

"Why come away?"

"It is full of ghosts; or, if it isn't, it ought to be."

"Why?"

"Because it is in here that they cast the bodies of those they murder for their money. Come away! Oh! I hear them whispering about it, when they think me only dreaming!"

"Who commit the murders? Whom do you overhear whispering?"

"The Yahoos back yonder. Come away."

And he even ran several yards along the adjacent pond, as though overcome with superstitious fear.

The detective quieted him, and, finally, after doing his best to instill the necessity of caution in his mind, returned with him to the house.

Cohen, the peddler, had arrived, and all hands

were just finishing the evening meal as the pair returned.

"Uncle and I will take a snack together, if you shall have anything left for us," said the pretended keeper, seating himself with his charge at a small side-table. "I find him hopelessly cracked, but have succeeded in winning his confidence."

"You sha'n't want for anything," said the hostess, good-naturedly.

And the serving-woman was ordered to supply the wants of the new-comers.

Both Digby and Smoothface, who had also remained to supper, were apparently in rare good spirits; the Grimsbys were watchful and observant; the peddler could talk of nothing but his pack, and the bargains it contained; and the counterfeit Mr. Jones, in obedience to a speaking glance from his confederate, was keeping awake with the greatest difficulty.

Presently the main table was cleared, the peddler opened his pack, and the preliminary farce of the evening, so far as the rogues were concerned, was fairly under way.

But at this juncture Mr. Jones almost fell out of his chair, through sheer weariness, or what seemed like it; and was forthwith conducted off to his bedroom by the master of the log-house.

While the women and Smoothface were bargaining and chaffing with the merchant over his wares, Digby drew the pretended Tom Smith apart.

"Your friend Jones," he whispered, "will be given a room next the one designed for the Dutchman, and, in a few minutes, Kimball will have chloroformed him into insensibility."

The other at once manifested the liveliest interest.

"Good!" said he. "I shall send off my patient to bed right away. Shall we then rob the pair of 'em together?"

"Of course not. What are we letting you into the job for, do you think, if it's as easy as all that?"

"Spit out what you've got to say!"

"Well, then, Mr. Jones will last along till morning, you know, since there's nothing but robbery intended with him."

"Exactly."

"You being able, through the hold you've got on his reputation, to prevent him from making too much noise after the fleeing."

"A good idea!"

"Cohen will have to be disposed of in the interim."

"What! you're not going to—"

"Shut up! Yes; it's simply a necessity in his case, or we'd never hear the last of the job. All you've got to do is to help dispose of the body."

"Oho!"

"Yes; the old man, Dick and I will manage the rest, while the old woman will have put a sleeping-draught in his parting cup of tea."

"Let me think it over. Well, it's only a peddler, anyway. All right! I'll be satisfied."

"You ought to be, when we let you off so easily."

"That be blowed! Murder's murder, as you know, if only consented in."

"That is true. Get your old stick-in-the-mud off to bed as soon as you can."

At this juncture Grimsby, alias Old Newthe, returned, with a nod to Digby, as much as to say, "All right; he's fixed for the night."

The detective took a mental note of this, and then roughly shook his seemingly drowsing patient by the shoulder, while secretly whispering a caution in his ear.

"Come, Uncle! up with you," he roared. "Bed time!"

"I sha'n't go!" snapped out the patient, in obedience to sealed instructions.

"Oho, you won't, eh? Mrs. Kimball, please have a light placed in Uncle's room, so I'll know where to take him. I may have to stay with him a bit, to give him another lesson."

The hostess sent up Dorothy with a light, and then added:

"He don't often behave so; mostly goes trotting up to his bed without any trouble."

"Well, he won't behave so again with me, and I'm betting on it! He isn't happy, and wants to be happier. That's what's the matter with him!"

With that he pounced upon the old man once more, with a tigerish bound and a hyena yell, and the knock-down-and-drag-out tactics, so to speak, of the earlier evening were repeated with commendable *eclat*.

"Now I think Uncle will come," pleasantly remarked the ex-pride of Ward's Island at the conclusion of the drubbing. "Come along, Uncle, and I'll put you to sleep with pretty song or a fairy story."

And he bore him off in triumph.

Ten minutes later, he stole out of the old man's room, and, after listening carefully to what was going on below stairs, crept stealthily from room to room, to discover the one in which Jardine had been stowed away.

A strong smell of chloroform guided him at last, and he entered the right apartment.

Jardine lay on his back, apparently unconscious, the light of a dim night-lamp playing over his deathlike features.

But at the first breath of his friend's whispered voice, he started up, laughed softly, and his eyes snapped apart.

"I thought your step might be that old cut-throat's again," said he. "Pah! how that chloroform stinks. Put it a little further away, Guy. Of course, I had to lay it off within reach, in case you shouldn't be the first to visit me."

Mainwaring did as he was requested, and then seated himself by the bed, with his eye on the door, which he had left ajar.

"No time is to be lost," he whispered, "as I can't tell how soon my continued absence may excite suspicions down-stairs."

"Very good! But good Lord, Guy! what a horrible den of crime is this that we have fallen into!"

"It takes the belt."

"Why, I suppose they took advantage of the poor old lawyer's weakness, kidnapped him, and intend to keep him here till he dies."

"They can't want him to die, or they would have made way with him long ago."

"How is that?"

"He hasn't got the later will on his person, but must have concealed it somewhere before falling into their power. That's the only explanation of their not having made way with him. They know it exists. It is the hope of ultimately obtaining and destroying it, through the old man's revelation, that saves his life."

"A good theory! Is he really crazy?"

"Not a bit of it! Stomach and memory gone, through the abrupt deprivation of opium, to which he has doubtless been accustomed for years."

"Is that all?"

"Yes; and these Yahoos, as he calls them, are either too dumb or too brutal to see it. If we can run him off, and feed him up again on the drug, he'll soon be all right, and the very last will and testament of Peregrine Calthorpe be presented for probate."

"Gad! we'll do it, then."

"Luke, if we save our own lives, and do nothing else, we'll be lucky. Yours is already in danger, and the peddler is doomed, if we cannot find means to save him."

"You don't mean it?"

"Listen! And Mainwaring hastily recounted everything that had happened since their separation in the morning."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A DESPERATE PLOT.

"AND they're really resolved on the death of the peddler?" gasped Jardine, as soon as the story was told. "You're sure of that?"

"Dead sure! I am booked for lending a hand in disposing of the corpse, which, I fancy, it is intended shall be thrown into an enormous pit, near the head of a pond, about a stone's-cast from the house here. His murder is a preliminary to robbing you of your fancied wealth, as I have hinted, and then kicking you out into the world."

"Good Lord! it seems more like an evil dream than reality. What do you advise?"

"I've thought it all over."

"How shall we manage?"

"You must save the peddler, and get out of the house with him before they can think he has had time to fall asleep."

"But the drugged tea that he will have drunk?"

"I must contrive some means of preventing his drinking it."

"Good, then! And we'll take the risk of getting away by the windows, and making tracks for the nearest village. But what is to become of you?"

"I'll take care of that. This bull-headed way of escaping on your part won't answer altogether, after all."

"Why not?"

"It would still leave our opium-craving lawyer in these villains' power. We must carry him off with us."

"I'm afraid it can't be done. You want to accomplish too much."

"As well be killed for a sheep as for a lamb. Besides, I have another plan."

"What is it?"

Mainwaring bent over the couch, and whispered for a full minute in his friend's ear.

The other smiled, and then nodded his assent.

"It sounds Quixotic enough," said he. "But the very novelty of the thing may carry it through."

"It must and shall. *Au revoir!* and look sharp!"

The women were still haggling with the peddler when the detective returned to the living room.

But the three men were looking impatient, even with some whisky before them, and they eyed him with discontent as he made his reappearance.

"You must have sung all the songs you knew to get that old imbecile asleep," sneered the host.

"Mebbe he was playing cards with him," suggested Smoothface. "The deuce knows you were long enough!"

The detective shrugged his shoulders contemp-

tuously, and then drew Digby apart, before he, too, could have time to join in the uncomplimentary comments.

"I don't mind telling *you*, Billings," said he, in a low voice, "that I was up-stairs longer than was absolutely necessary."

"What kept you?"

"I thought I heard a suspicious noise in one of the rooms. So I slipped around until I entered the one where Jones is lying."

"What did you do there?"

"Gad! I took the drug-soaked cloth from his face. It was part of the bargain that he is not to be killed, and he's now so near death's door that artillery wouldn't awake him. Go up and see for yourself, if you don't believe me."

Digby communicated this to his male confederates, and then Old Newthe and he went up-stairs to investigate.

Their return, with a nod and a smile, was sufficient proof that Jardine had successfully counterfeited the chloroform trance, and that their confidence in himself was greatly increased.

Mr. Cohen presently closed his pack, announcing that he couldn't dicker all night over the remaining few cents his fair customers might have retained in their possession.

"What shall we do?—play cards?" suggested Smoothface. "I suppose you're not sleepy, Cohen?"

"Nod eggzhaghtly," was the sententious reply, "put I neffer blay mit de gards. I pelieve I go to ped shust de zame."

"You must have a cup of tea first, my dear Mr. Cohen," said Mrs. Bentincke.

"I tond gare if I does, ma'm. Dey do zay dat dea are coot vor de shtomach pefore coing to pet mit von's selluf."

"Of course it is!" and, dismissing Dorothy to her roost, she began to set out the cups and saucers with her own fair hands. "It is a time-honored custom in the old Kimball family, this cup of tea as a night-cap."

"Unt it ish a dime-honored gustom mit de Gohens," said the peddler, drawing cheerfully up to the table, "to trink vot effer gan pe hat midout baying vor it. Dea aind eggdra, ish it?" with sudden anxiety.

"Oh, no; it will cost you nothing."

"Den I may trink t'ree or vour gups mit you."

"I should like a cup, too, madam, if it's all the same," said the detective, though mentally agreeing that Mr. Cohen was almost mean enough to be poisoned, after all.

"Certainly."

Then the head of the house thought that tea would be good for his digestion likewise; while the younger remaining rogues sneeringly resolved that the whisky was good enough for them.

The detective had managed to seat himself between the hostess and Mr. Cohen, and also to exchange cups with the latter after the beverage had been poured.

A similarly dextrous movement enabled him then to make an exchange with Mrs. Bentincke, who was therefore provided unconsciously with the specially doctored cup of tea prepared for the peddler.

This operation was repeated every time the cups were replenished, which was quite often.

The consequence was that while, much to the first mystification of the conspirators, the peddler seemed to grow more wakeful and affable, the worthy hostess herself began to grow heavy-eyed and hazy.

"What the dogs is the matter?" whispered Digby to Old Newthe. "A barrel of the stuff wouldn't pipe off the old money-bags at this rate, while the old lady herself is fairly boozy."

"I'll attend to it," was the reply.

The pretended Kimball then found occasion to whisper to his wife:

"Wake up, wake up! You've somehow drugged yourself, instead of the Jew. At this rate, you may ruin everything."

She tried to brace herself up, but with indifferent success.

Here the detective began to tremble for the success of his counter-plot.

Smoothface toyed with the handle of a dirk, that was visible for an instant, while Digby began to frown impatiently; so that it became possible that the chatty and urbane peddler would be murdered outright, without a preliminary slumber being waited for.

But at this juncture, fortunately for the detective's scheme, Mrs. Bentincke incontinently tumbled off her chair in a state of insensibility. During the momentary confusion that prevailed, Mainwaring managed to whisper a warning in the Jew's ear.

"Make believe to be sleepy, or you are lost!" he whispered. "They intend to murder you in your sleep. Allay their suspicions by getting up-stairs as quickly as possible. There is some one up there to help you."

The peddler had turned ashy pale, but he was fortunately possessed of a reserve fund of presence of mind.

A moment later, and he, too, began to yawn, gape, and roll about in his chair.

"My Cott in Himmel!" he sleepily gasped; "vot ish de madder mit myselluf! It musht

haff been somedings mit de dea. I gan shympadize mit de leddy, vor I vas neffer so shleepy pefore in all my porn tays. I kess I would like to put me in my liddle ped."

He wound up by rubbing his eyes and bumping his forehead against the table-edge.

However, he clawed hold of his precious pack as they were assisting him out of the room, and no objection was made to his carrying it away with him.

The detective contrived to be one of those to help him up-stairs to his room, which, luckily enough, chanced to be the one next to that occupied by Mr. Jones.

His lamp being lighted and his pack deposited under the bed, Cohen began to lumber about the apartment, indistinctly swearing that he would walk off some of his unnatural stupor before retiring, or die in the attempt.

The pretended Tom Smith grinningly beckoned his companions out of the room, and all hands returned down-stairs to wait.

"Now I'll play cards with you," said he to Smoothface, briskly drawing up to the table, and helping himself to the whisky. "We ought to give Moneyguts a good half-hour to trip off into the Land of Nod, and in the mean time I'm willing to win your pile or lose my own. Where are the pasteboards?"

Smoothface had already pricked up his ears, and Digby was no less eager for the game.

Cards were quickly produced, and a game of whisky-poker was speedily in progress.

"Are you coming in?" asked the detective, looking up to the host of the log-house with his most persuasive smile.

The latter, who had been carrying the unconscious form of his wife to a near-at-hand lounge, shook his head, and said he would be content to look on.

But the gambling instinct was as strong with him as with his confederates, and he too was soon engaged in the play.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE COUNTER-PLOT.

THE Gliding Detective was a magician with the cards.

Adept at foul-play as were his infamous companions on the present occasion, he somehow caused the fortunes of the game to fluctuate in a manner that fairly mystified them.

First one would be slightly the winner, then his elbow-companion would for a brief space have all the luck, only to see it presently disappear to his next neighbor's direction, and so it passed around.

"Curse it all!" growled Digby, at last; "nobody will ever be five dollars ahead at this rate, and our little subject up-stairs must have gone dead to sleep long ago."

"He'll keep," said the detective. "Your deal Mr. Kimball!"

Fully an hour was consumed in this way.

Finally Old Newthe sprang up with an oath, and dashed the detective's pasteboards in every direction with a sweep of his hand.

"What are we here for?" he exclaimed. "The Jew will have slept off the drug while we are making infernal fools of ourselves."

"Hold on!" cried Smoothface. "Smith's ahead of the crowd, and I'm at least two dollars out."

"That be banged!"

Old Newthe had already drawn his knife, and Digby, also rising, though a little reluctantly, seemed likewise in readiness for the projected assassination.

"Come, Dick!" said the latter. "Durn the cards—at least till later on! You aren't going to back down?"

"Me back down!" And Smoothface was on his feet, knife in hand. "Come ahead!"

The detective had remained seated.

"Ah, you're in luck!" said Digby, with a sneer. "You're only booked for the graveyard racket."

The detective gave a fierce laugh, and he struck the table with his fist.

One might have thought that the scent of the midnight murder on foot had suddenly fired his heart.

"No, by Jupiter!" he exclaimed, rising. "I'm with you, my hearties!"

Digby smiled his approbation, and, with Old Newthe in the lead, they ascended the stairs.

"We ought to hear him snoring," murmured the latter. "Wait!" And he bent listening at the peddler's door.

Not a sound came from within, though it was evident that the lamp was still burning.

"Maybe the drug was enough for him," suggested Digby. "Go in!"

Old Newthe obeyed, stealthily entering the room, but almost instantly recoiling.

"Gone, by Jupiter!" was his ejaculation.

"Impossible!"

Headed by Smoothface, the others rushed into the apartment.

The window was open, and the distance to the ground outside was not great.

The peddler, with his belongings, had vanished.

Neither was there any sign of the bed having been touched—he might have effected his escape as soon as left to himself.

"Tricked, duped, and by such a stupid Dutchman!" hoarsely cried Smoothface, who seemed the most highly exasperated, though the others were sufficiently chagrined. "Some one must have given the snap away to him. Was it you, Smith?" And he turned menacingly upon the latter.

"You're a fool!" roared the detective. "If you accuse me of treachery, I'll break your back!"

"Maybe the servant warned him," suggested Digby.

"Impossible," said Newthe, "for she wasn't into the plot. But wait; I'll slip up to her room and make sure."

This was accordingly done, but he quickly returned to say that the woman was in a deep natural sleep, and consequently could not be justly suspected of having conveyed the warning.

The Smoothface, who had been moody, suddenly brightened up.

"Don't let's be cheated out of our meat," said he, with a malicious look toward the detective. "Mr. Jones is lying in the next room, I believe."

The suggestion was eagerly caught up by his actual confederates.

Yes; in default of the peddler, Jones should be murdered, no less than robbed.

Such was the deciding vote.

But the detective set his teeth in pretended desperation, and drew his revolver.

"No you don't!" said he, barring the way back into the passage. "A promise is a promise, and I'm going to hold you to yours. If not exactly my friend now, Jack Jones used to be my friend, and not a knife shall bleed him while I am here to stand between."

They admired what they considered his sublime pluck, but were none the less determined.

However, they only had resort to argument and persuasion.

According to his own statement, this contractor, Jones, wasn't of much account to him—to Smith. Why, then, should Smith stand in the way of the will of the majority, especially seeing that dead men alone tell no tales, and that to let the fellow go scot-free after despoiling him would always thereafter involve a sense of insecurity for the spoilers. And so on.

Slowly, and with apparently the profoundest reluctance, the detective yielded his ground, and finally consented to let the murder proceed.

"Go ahead, then!" And he sullenly stepped to one side. "But you'll do this job alone. The cuss was once my pal, say what you please, and I sha'n't look on to his cutting up."

So the adjoining room was entered by the would-be assassins, and with the result that can be readily guessed by the reader.

Mr. Jones was also found to have vanished, and under circumstances even more inexplicable than had attended the peddler's disappearance.

"I say, Smith," growled Digby, when the first shock of the second disappointment had subsided, "you visited the cuss after he was put to bed. You confessed as much to me."

"And you, together with Mr. Kimball there, visited him directly afterward," was the collected reply.

"So we did! That's the truth."

"Come, let's after them!" cried Old Newthe. "Neither one of 'em knows the mountain roads hereabouts, and we may yet track 'em down."

This advice was at once acted on. Lanterns were procured, and the four men proceeded to search outside, under the two bedroom windows for whatever clew might be afforded.

A light rain had fallen, rendering the ground soft, which was all the better for such a search.

"Here are their tracks!" cried out the detective. "Look!"

They were sufficiently perceptible, and led off toward the adjacent pond, instead of in the direction of the road.

"It's bully!" exclaimed Old Newthe, rubbing his hands. "They're sure to have got bewildered off in that direction. Come on! We'll have 'em yet."

But the footmarks were found to lead not only around the pond, but directly to the brink of the abandoned shaft, where they abruptly disappeared.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the detective; "they must have stumbled down in the darkness. What sort of devil's pit is this, anyway?"

"Come away from it!" called out Old Newthe, as much depressed as poor 'Uncle' had been on the previous occasion. "It's uncanny—it's an evil place!"

Digby and Smoothface, equally superstitious, had also drawn back.

"But what's there to be afraid of?" persisted the detective, swinging his lantern over the edge and peering down into the gulf, which seemed to be a hollow darkness of interminable depth. "It's bad enough to have had our men stumble into this hole, especially as they must have carried their money with them, but what else is there to be alarmed about?"

"Come back from it, I tell you!" called out the old ruffian again. "The Lord only knows how many murdered bodies have been chucked down that pit!"

"Yes; it's an awful place," added Smoothface. "It's got a worse reputation than a hangman's graveyard!"

At this juncture the detective started back, with an exclamation of horror.

Then the others gave a simultaneous yell, and started to run, but their limbs for the time being refused their office.

Two silent and sheeted figures were slowly, solemnly rising out of the pit.

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF THE GULF.

"GHOSTS! ghosts!" yelled Smoothface, throwing up his hands. "They're coming for us, sure!"

But Old Newthe's terror was by far the most pitiable.

His knees knocked together, his teeth clattered like castanets, his face was the hue of death.

"Oh, Lord! I confess all," he faltered. "Since long ago, I have robbed and murdered travelers hereabouts! I confess all—only let up on me this once!"

With an oath at his cowardice, though scarcely less unnerved himself, Cracksman Charley, alias Digby, alias Billings, dealt him a staggering blow.

But the sheeted figures had crept over the margin of the pit.

Slowly, relentlessly, they were floating down upon the conscience-stricken wretches, like shapes of mist upon the wind.

To their excited imaginations, the shapes assumed exaggerated proportions and characteristics.

They became towering and sheeted skeletons, with glaring, eyeless sockets, grinning, fleshless jaws, and out-grasping bony arms and fingers. Superstitious humanity could bear no more.

The villainous trio turned to flee.

But by some mishap, doubtless through his own terror, one of their number—the desperado who has been characterized as Smoothface—stumbled to his knees, and when he had regained his feet, one of the phantoms was between him and his companions.

The apparition turned upon him, shaking its arms aloft, with an unearthly wail.

The villain backed away from it, step by step, holding his hand before his face.

There was nothing to interpose between him and the horrid brink.

He retreated one step too many, toppled backward and disappeared into the gulf with a scream.

The catastrophe completed the panic of his two companions in crime.

Pursued by the phantoms, with the Gliding Detective judiciously bringing up the rear, they fled as fast as their trembling limbs could carry them.

But the ghostly pursuers were on their track—along the margin of the lake—to the doors of the very house itself.

The fugitives durst not even enter there.

After a momentary pause at the porch, they turned, continuing their flight along the mountain road, and disappeared amid the gloom.

"Quick!" cried Mainwaring; "no time is to be lost. Here are lanterns. Into the stables with you, while I am getting the opium-eater in readiness for the drive. Our ruse has succeeded beyond my fondest hopes."

The "phantoms" were not backward in following his instructions.

Tearing off their sheeted disguises, they stepped forth in their own proper persons—that is, in the persons of Cohen, the peddler, and Luke Jardine, the counterfeit Mr. Jones—and, seizing the lanterns that were thrust into their hands, hurried off in the direction of the barn.

After making their escape, carrying with them the material for their ghostly disguises, they had concealed themselves just below the mouth of the pit, supporting themselves on an old cross-timber that Mainwaring had advised his colleague of, and with the astonishing result that had been seen.

The ruse was the Gliding Detective's *chef d'œuvre* in that line, and its development had been fortuitously assisted by fate.

Simultaneously with the departure of his confederates upon the duty assigned them, Mainwaring rushed into the house.

Mrs. Bentincke was still snoring upon the lounge, though in a fitful and uneasy slumber.

He passed her by, and hurried to the opium-craver's room.

The old man was asleep, with his clothes on, as the detective had provided.

"Awake!" he shouted, shaking him roughly by the shoulder. "The time is come. You are to escape now with me."

Starting up from a hideous dream, it was some little time before the dazed old man could dimly comprehend what was required of him.

Even then, he took to the plan with anything but kindness.

"Go away!" he muttered, sulkily. "It isn't office hours yet. Get out! What do you mean by disturbing me? Oh!" And he clutched at his stomach with the old convulsive movement.

"Nonsense! bestir yourself. You must go with me—away from the Yahoos, you know."

"I will not! Yahoos are good enough in their way. Let me alone!"

"Opium!" yelled the detective in his ear, as a last resort. "Don't you want a dose?"

The old man was on his feet in an instant.

"Yes, yes!" he cried, eagerly. "Opium, opium! Where is it? Give me some! I faint, I die! I suffer torture for it!"

"I am going to carry you to a storehouse crammed with it. Be quick, or you shall not have any."

There was no need of further persuasion. He carried the old man along with him unresistingly.

There was a noise in the living-room as he was about passing through it on his way back to the open air.

Cause enough!

As he entered, he was confronted by the Bentincke woman with an uplifted ax.

She was like a fury.

Seemingly but half-awake, and doubtless with the after-effect of the drugged tea frenzying her brain, blood was in her wild eye, demoniac rage in her entire aspect.

The detective recoiled with his companion in time to avoid a murderous blow, and then, striking her ruthlessly down with his fist, strode on.

Jardine and Cohen were already at the door with Digby's horse, and a two-seated wagon, into which the peddler had already tossed his pack, which had been hidden away near the house.

All were on board in a moment, heading for the adjacent road.

But at this juncture there was a crash of breaking glass.

They turned to perceive Mrs. Bentincke, ax in one hand, a brand of fire in the other, roaming from room to room in her course of destruction.

The house was already on fire in several places.

"She's gone mad!" cried Mainwaring, reining in the horse. "The hired woman will be burned to death! We must save her at every hazard."

But even while he was speaking, the frightened Dorothy could be seen letting herself down from one of the upper windows.

They lingered in the road till assured of the woman's safety, and until the incendiary herself was seen to rush frantically into the open air.

Then, by the light of the blazing building, which was now a hollow square of crackling and writhing flames, they laid the whip to the horse, and dashed off down the mountain road.

"If what was told me is true," said the Gliding Detective, "Westchester county's sole remaining log-house is fast disappearing, and I doubt if there will ever be another."

But their perilous adventure was not yet at an end.

As they were crossing a brook, near an old farm-house, at the foot of the mountain, where the flames in the background still vividly lighted up their environments, there were a couple of shots that passed uncomfortably near their heads.

The shots were repeated, and then Digby and Old Newthe, pistols in hand, and accompanied by two stalwart rustics, dashed into view from the farm-house porch.

A glance showed the detective party that the villains had not only mastered their superstitious fears, but had suddenly become aware of the ruse that had prompted them.

"Incendiaries! horse-thieves!" yelled the elder ruffian heading the rush that was being made to head off the fugitives; "surrender, or you are dead men!"

At the same instant, another of their shots seriously wounded the horse, causing him to rear and plunge.

Cohen and Mr. Fieldman were naturally of little account in such an extremity, but the revolvers of the two detectives were out in an instant.

"Scoundrels! keep off!" called out Mainwaring, putting a bullet through Old Newthe's hat-crown by way of emphasizing his warning. "And you fellows, yonder! Are you such fools as to be persuaded by the statements of those cut-throats? It is they who are robbers and murderers!"

Here Jardine also fired, his bullet ripping Cracksman's Charley's left ear, as a reminder of his own ability in the shooting line.

The countrymen, who were armed with pitchforks, wavered, and seemed to eye their companions with suspicion.

But at this juncture the horse was no longer manageable.

In spite of a wound in the shoulder from which he was breathing feebly, he took the bit in his teeth and dashed away, whirling the wagon and its occupants after him at a terrific pace, and within sound of two more ineffectual shots from the ruffians before he was out of hearing.

Then he suddenly balked, coming to a dead stop.

The application of the whip only started him forward a few paces, after which he stopped again.

And so the pace went jekingly on, until the

railroad crossing was approached, when a clatter of hoof-beats, together with glances thrown behind, showed that the four men were in pursuit on horseback.

"Don't be in a hurry, Guy," said Jardine, whose revolver was still in his hand. "Surely you and I are a match for the four of 'em."

"Not without risking the death of a farmer or two by mistake," replied Mainwaring, still keeping the steel to his desultory pace. "Yonder's the railroad, and just a little beyond is the shaft tavern, whose proprietor didn't look altogether like a backer of cut-throats."

Mr. Fieldman had kept pretty quiet, but the German peddler's terror had by this time reached the climax.

"Mein Gott in Himmel!" he yelled, wringing his hands; "we shall all be gilled, unt my bropperty—my breicious mershandises—vill all be sbtoled or destroyed!"

"Hold your tongue," said Mainwaring, sharply. "If it hadn't been for us, how would you have fared at the log-house, you avaricious jackass?"

Here they bounced over the rails; but a few yards further on, when nearly to the shaft buildings, a fearful, but hoped-against reverse overtook them.

The horse balked again, and then fell dead.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GETTING OUT OF A TIGHT PLACE.

To spring from the wagon, disengage it from the dead animal, and intrench themselves behind it at the side of the road, after first pulling out their two charges, as imbecile Mr. Fieldman and the fright-palsied peddler might be termed, was the work of but a few treasured instants on the part of the brother detectives.

And this was no sooner effected than the four horsemen came galloping up, discharging their weapons as they came to a momentary halt.

"Guy Mainwaring, you are recognized at last!" yelled the *pseudo* Old Newthe, flourishing his revolver. "Give in, and surrender back the old lawyer into my hands, and you will not be further molested."

"Old Tom Grimsby, ex-pirate, cut-throat at large, and murderer of Peregrine Calthorpe and Ichabod Taylor, *you* are known, too, and you are at about the end of your rope!" thundered the Gliding Detective, in response. "As for the rest of your hectoring, oblige me by going to the devil!"

At the same instant he fired, his bullet this time grazing the old ruffian's cheek.

Grimsby uttered a sort of roar, fired an ineffectual shot, and then galloped up the road, while his companions spurred their horses under the shadow of a clump of trees.

A new day was now fast breaking, there being already sufficient light to distinguish objects at a considerable distance.

Mr. Cohen's terror had assumed a new phase, and he began to hop around as if dancing a compulsory jig, while yelling out afresh concerning his "bropperty," but no attention was paid to him.

The two detectives were elbow to elbow behind their improvised barricade, while Mr. Fieldman was helplessly squatted on the ground behind them, occasionally clutching his stomach, and muttering unintelligible words, that might or might not be an entreaty for his favorite drug.

"Bear one thing in mind, Luke," said Mainwaring, quietly. "Whatever chances, we're not to give up the old gentleman."

"I sha'n't forget," was the equally composed reply. "How do you think it will end?"

"Favorably, I think."

"Honestly?"

"Yes."

"But that old villain has, doubtlessly, ridden away to rally the aqueduct men to his support."

"Can he do it?"

"That is to be seen."

"I don't think he can."

"Still, most of them are Italian scum—stiletto-slingers—natural-born stabbers and ruffians."

"But the keeper of that saloon seemed to have much influence with them, and he didn't strike me as an essentially bad man."

"I hope you are right, Guy. But it is well to be prepared for the worst."

"And I am not unprepared for it. Cuff that cowardly peddler into silence, will you? Throw your glance along the railroad line down yonder."

"Well?"

"What do you note?"

"Nothing but a couple of hand-cars, partly loaded with old ties, side-tracked by a gravel bank."

"Well, one of them shall be our last resort. Still, I am in hopes—"

Here his hopes were nipped in the bud by a chorus of yells from up the road.

Then a dozen or more Italian desperadoes, with Grimsby, still mounted, at their head, were seen charging down upon the frail barricade.

They were flourishing knives, clubs and stones, and were yelling like incarnate fiends.

To make the matter worse, the saloon-keeper was observed to be prominent among them, as if inciting them to some bloody determination.

"I was, unfortunately, right," groaned Jardine, while Cohen renewed his terrified outcries. "We shall have the whole hornets' nest about our ears!"

Mainwaring said nothing.

His teeth were clinched, his face set like a bronze mask.

"Look to old Fieldman," was all he muttered, after a stern pause.

Then, just at the critical moment, he leaped fearlessly into full view on top of the wagon, and by a splendid gesture demanded a parley.

The mob momentarily recoiled, such was their admiration for the coolly defiant act.

Then, in a clear, ringing voice, and singling out the saloon-keeper as his auditor, he presented the unvarnished truth of the situation in brief, telling, well selected terms.

"Now you've got the whole truth of it," he cried out in conclusion, "tell me, sir, as a law-abiding man, what you think of yourself for bringing those ignorant men to that crime-stained old ruffian, who is even now fighting us with the hangman's rope about his neck."

And he pointed disdainfully at Grimsby.

"He lies!" roared the latter. "The pair of 'em are incendiaries and cut-throats in detective disguise! Don't parley with 'em! Cut 'em down! Wipe 'em out!"

The saloon-keeper silenced him with an impatient gesture, though the mob were becoming freshly demonstrative, as if getting ready for a rush.

"You make out a fine case for your side, young fellow," he answered. "But this old man swears to me that the direct opposite of the case is the truth. He also avers that you have murdered Dick Satterly (Smoothface), who chances to have been my friend."

Mainwaring earnestly denied the accusation, and was beginning to give the particulars of the gambler's tragic death when his voice was drowned by renewed yells from the freshly infuriated mob.

Cracksman Charley then completed the interruption by suddenly spurring out from his cover, and leveling his revolver full at the dauntless detective's breast.

"Die, murderer of Dick Satterly, die!" he shouted.

His bullet sped at the same time, but was evaded by a simultaneous gliding, or shrinking movement to one side, the execution of which was one of the gliding detective's phenomenal feats of dexterity.

The latter then returned the fire with the rapidity of thought, purposely bringing down the ruffian's horse, and was back again behind the wagon in another instant.

None too soon either, as a narrowly-escaped shower of sticks and stones testified.

Even an almost simultaneous shot from Jardine, with the result of bringing down Grimsby's horse, was not enough to retard the general assault that ensued.

Two more shots, however, with the effect of seriously wounding two of the assailants, served a little better, and the crowd rolled back, though growling and muttering, like the shore-wave that recoils but to return again.

"Be quick!" muttered Mainwaring, grasping the old lawyer's arm. "Be ready, Luke, to break through the trees here for the smaller of the hand-cars when I give the word. Shut up your whining, and hold yourselves in readiness for a spurt, Mr. Cohen."

"Vat!" yelled the peddler, with a frantic motion toward his pack, which, having been exposed on top of the wagon, was already sadly battered; "unt leaf mine bropperty behind?"

"Certainly; you must go disencumbered, or not at all."

"Neffer, py Chimminy, neffer!"

"All right!" with stern indifference. "I have done my duty in making you the offer."

The last repulse of the crowd had given the detectives time to reload their revolvers.

When, therefore, at this juncture, a fresh assault was attempted, they were enabled once more to nip it in the bud by a rapid discharge of the united chambers in rapid succession over the heads of the crowd.

Then the latter once more retired, after a fresh volley of sticks and stones, which was without effect.

"Now's the time! Run for it!"

Then the two detectives were off for the line of the railroad like arrows, dragging the old lawyer between them.

For the greater part of the distance the view of their retreat was cut off by the intervening trees.

When it finally was discovered, and there was heard the yell of the mob as it started in pursuit, the lightest of the hand-cars was almost within the grasp of the fugitives.

Both detectives had, fortunately, had some experience in practical railroading.

Consequently, to switch the car from the siding to the main track, jump aboard with their charge, and man the breaks, was with them but the work of a few minutes.

Still, the crowd ought to have come up with them before this much had been effected.

A single glance back to the abandoned barricade explained the interruption.

Like a pack of pursuing wolves, temporarily retarded by some poor victim flung to their fury by a fugitive sledge-load of persons, the crowd had paused midway in their pursuit to fling themselves upon the unfortunate peddler and his merchandise.

Swarming over the wagon and over one another, they were looking over the contents of his pack with savage cries and laughter; and, though tearing his hair in his frenzied entreaties for them to desist, the miserable owner was himself sharing hardly a better fate than his property.

"The cowardly, avaricious whelp!" commented Mainwaring; "he has only himself to blame for his misfortune. Give way, Luke! This looks like getting out of our hot water."

Crash! went the cranks, the wheels of the hand-car responded, and away they sped down the track.

But before they made a certain curve in the iron road, they saw the remaining hand-car in hot pursuit, with Grimsby and Cracksman in the middle, revolvers in hand, and half a dozen brawny foreigners at the breaks.

"There's a way to dispose of them when the time comes," was the Gliding Detective's cool observation. "Our only danger at present is meeting with an up-train—a danger, by the way, always more or less imminent on these single-track roads, and especially enhanced in the absence of a time-table. If we can only get as far as Dobb's Ferry without interruption, I shall rest satisfied."

"Why Dobb's Ferry?" inquired Luke.

"Because I chance to have a physician friend there, under whose immediate care I trust that our poor old legal gentleman here will speedily recover both his memory and his senses."

Here Jardine suddenly called out.

"But look, Guy. They're fast gaining on us, and even lightening up by tossing off their cargo of ties."

"Leave it to me," said the other. "There is a little game worth two of that."

Then, as the car shot around another curve, cutting off the view, he coolly abandoned his break.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"WHAT on earth are you doing?" exclaimed Jardine, looking up.

"What you see," was Mainwaring's collected response.

He, also, was unloading the car of the dozen or more old ties with which the hand-car was burdened, causing them to fall in the track in such a way that the pursuing car could not possibly avoid derailment by the obstructions.

"Hurrah!" cried Jardine, continuing at the crank with redoubled energy; "that is a trick worthy of your invention, Guy."

"It is their stupidity in not foreseeing it that will chiefly favor us," was the detective's quiet reply, as the last tie fell from his hands.

This was at a point where the road was on a high embankment, with a dangerous ditch on either side.

The pursuing hand-car just then made its appearance around the curve.

It was coming at a fearful speed, and its excited occupants, with eyes for nothing but the fugitives, were yelling and gesticulating as if certain that victory was already in their grasp.

Both the controlling ruffians were, indeed, just leveling their revolvers when their car struck the first of the obstructions.

It thrust this one aside, and cut the next one in two, but the third was too much for it.

Over it went, with its yelling burden, a hopeless wreck, into the deeper of the side-ditches, and the chase was at an end.

Dobb's Ferry was reached without mishap by the fugitives, and Mr. Fieldman taken to Guy's medical friend, a Dr. Wentworth, with the least possible delay.

It chanced that Dr. Wentworth was a very capable physician, who had made the treatment of opium patients a special study, and with a success that had brought him fame and fortune.

After listening to the strange history connected with the present case, he gave the unfortunate lawyer a sedative, and recommended that he be left solely in his charge for a few days.

This was readily agreed, after due caution had been given as to the necessity of guarding the patient from any attempt at interference.

"My house is a little hospital for opium sufferers," said the physician. "No communication can be possible between them and the outside world, without my permission. Mr. Fieldman will do finely there."

"But how long," asked Mainwaring, "before he will have recovered his memory as to recently past events and the missing will, that I have been telling you of?"

"To a certain extent, within two or three days," was the reply. "But weeks, perhaps months will be required to counteract the shocks that have been undergone."

This was all the detectives cared to know, and they forthwith took their departure from the physician's house.

"It is the beginning of the end," remarked the Gliding Detective. "I feel it in my bones."

Both were so thoroughly exhausted that, directly after procuring some much-needed refreshment, they went to bed at a small hotel, where they occupied adjoining rooms.

When Jardine awoke, it was almost night, and he was conscious of something unusual going on in the next apartment, though his call to Mainwaring received no response.

Rushing in, he found the latter in a desperate hand-to-hand struggle with a powerful ruffian, who was just on the point of overpowering him.

As Jardine sprang to his brother detective's assistance, however, the rascal suddenly took flight, leaping out of the window, by which it was evident that he had effected an entrance.

Mainwaring proved to be unhurt, though greatly blown and exhausted.

"I shall be all right in a minute," said he. "Curse that villain! his is the only strength that ever proved my master—it has always been so."

"What! you recognized him, then?"

"Yes, in spite of his fresh disguise. Did not you?"

"No."

"It was Cracksman Charley."

Jardine threw himself into a chair, while his friend set about his toilet.

"So they've tracked us again, and so soon," said he. "I wonder if we shall go back to New York alive, Guy."

"We shall do our best to," said Mainwaring, with a smile. "Don't be disheartened, old boy."

"But one can't help it, occasionally. These scoundrels appear to be almost omniscient."

"But it is only in appearance, when you come to think of it. They must have escaped their tumble into the ditch without serious injury, and then to track us to our whereabouts in a small suburban town like this would be no great matter."

"But may they not likewise have tracked our opium-patient to his retreat?"

"We shall see to that without a moment's delay. His safety is altogether too precious to be risked, at least until Mr. Peregrine Calthorpe's last will and testament are secured. After that, hey for New York!"

"And we shall get back there none too soon. I long to know what batch of fresh news my darling little Justine will have for our next meeting."

Inquiry at Dr. Wentworth's proved Mr. Fieldman to have been unmolested, and to be doing promisingly.

"It was ten at night when New York was again reached by a Hudson River Railroad train."

Then the detectives lost no time in proceeding to the Rose Hill Manor-house.

To their consternation, they discovered that neither Issie nor Justine were any longer there.

It was Lois who gave them the information.

"Issie," said she, "surprised and mystified everybody by hurrying away last evening, and taking her maid with her. Their trunks had been hastily packed, and no intimation was vouchsafed as to where they were going, or when they intended to return."

"Did you ask Issie yourself?" inquired Mainwaring.

"Yes. But she was very reserved, and would say nothing, save that urgent business was prompting her to a long journey."

"A long journey?"

"Yes; she may have gone out West, or even to Europe, for aught I know."

As Lois seemed desirous of saying something to him in private, Mainwaring politely hinted as much to Jardine, who lost no time in acting upon the intimation.

"Poor fellow!" said Mainwaring, as soon as he was alone with Lois; "he feels all broken up at not finding Justine."

"It is chiefly of her I wish to speak," said Lois.

"Of Justine?"

"Yes."

"What of her?"

"There was something the matter with the young woman when she went away."

"Was she ill?"

"Not physically, I think. But she acted very strangely."

"In what way?"

"She was troubled, taciturn, furtive. One would have said that she was a condemned slave being led away to execution."

"Oho!"

"Yes; Issie did not once take her eye off the girl, who seemed mortally afraid of her, and yet too cowed to say that her soul was her own."

"I begin to understand."

"That is more than I do. Perhaps you will be good enough to explain."

"Certainly. Justine possesses the dearest secret of her young mistress's life, and the latter is determined it shall not be shared elsewhere."

"Are you sure of this?"

"Quite sure. Justine has frequently de-

clared her possession of such a secret to Jardine, who is her affianced lover."

"And with whom is it feared that she might share this secret?"

"With me—that is, through Jardine."

"With you?"

"Yes."

"Ha! does it concern Mr. Calthorpe's murder?"

"Not at all."

"To what does the secret refer?"

"To my marriage."

Lois's sad face grew troubled.

"That again!" she murmured.

"Yes!" he cried, passionately; "that again, and that always, till the mystery shall be solved."

"Mystery?"

"Yes. Listen to me, Lois."

"Go on, then."

"You know the haunting issue. Issie claims to have married me on that memorable night by a cunning fraud, which you understand."

"I understand her claim."

"Exactly; and that is all I can understand at present. Justine, however, understands the nature of the fraud."

"You mean, she understands how the deception was practiced, by which Issie claims to have personated me, and married you in my stead?"

"I am morally sure that she understands more and better than that."

"What can that be?"

"That no deception was practiced at all—that it is only Issie's claim to that deception that is a fraud."

"But you were married to some one."

"I hope, I am sure I shall be able to prove by Justine that that same one was yourself."

Lois made a weary gesture.

"That again!" she repeated.

"And that always!" he reiterated. "Lois, you are my wife!"

She looked at him reproachfully.

"I shall have to leave you."

"Lois, you are my wife!"

She started to quit the room—her mother's reception room, in which the interview was taking place.

He caught her in his arms.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LOIS AND HER LOVER.

LOIS was prompt to release herself from Mainwaring's compulsory embrace, but he remarked with secret exultation that she did so with less of indignation than on former occasions.

"You forget yourself, sir!" was her only reproach.

"Forgive me, Lois!"

"Oh, yes; I forgive you. But if you touch me again, I shall never permit you to see me more."

"But you are my wife, Lois, and I intend to prove it by Justine."

"What! prove it against my own knowledge?"

"Yes; or against your own consciousness."

She repeated her gesture of weariness.

"Well," said she, dryly, "we will wait till she has proved that decidedly remarkable thing."

"Lois!"

"What is it, Guy?"

"You have more than once vaguely mentioned that you dreamed having married me that night."

She started.

"True," she murmured. "True, though I had half-forgotten. Yes; I did dream it."

"Would you mind telling me the circumstances under which you had that dream?"

"Haven't I told you once?"

"Not as particularly as I would like."

"To what end is all this? Of what would you satisfy yourself?"

"That it is not impossible for you to have married me—actually married me—though yet in a dream."

"This is madness! But I do not object recounting the circumstances under which I dreamed it."

"Thank you."

"It was shortly after eight o'clock when I reached my room after my interview with you in Mount Morris Square. I was troubled and exhausted with what had passed—your persistence in demanding the secret marriage, which I as persistently had refused to listen to. I will be frank, and say also, that I half-regretted that persistency on my part."

"Ha! you regretted it—you had been on the verge of consenting to it, then?"

"Yes. I can admit this now, without any sense of shame. My afterthought was of how unhappy I was here—of how my parents insisted in forcing the loathed attentions of that Carolus Digby on me—of how you loved me—all this was almost too much for me. I sobbed and wept a good deal. Then I lay down in my clothes, without intending to go to sleep, it was still so early in the night. Nevertheless, I did fall to sleep almost immediately. Slumber seemed to suddenly shut down upon me like a thick and muffling veil. It was then that I dreamed of going to you again, and marrying you, in the way in which you say you actually

married the woman who stood up with you before the minister."

"Suppose you repeat the particulars of your dream of the ceremony once more, Lois."

She did so.

"It is just as if you had been there!" he exclaimed. "Therefore, you must have been there!"

"Oh, please don't go over that again! it is so preposterous."

"Well, then, I sha'n't. But tell me one thing more."

"What is it?"

"How did the dream end? What did you dream after the ceremony, and after your separation from me?"

"My dream after that was confused—was no longer vivid and life-like."

"But what were the fragments of it?"

"Well, I seemed to have returned here, and to have begun to undress, while preparing for bed. Then there appeared to be a struggle."

"A struggle?"

"Yes; or an attempt of one on my part, for it was a kind of nightmare."

"What sort of a struggle?"

"One in which some one—I could not see who—was trying to deprive me of my wedding ring and my marriage-certificate. And I was trying to resist the attempt—or rather I was trying to try, but could not, being in the nightmare paralysis."

"Ah! well, and then?"

"Then all was suddenly a blank. I knew nothing more till the following day."

The detective made no immediate comment, but was looking at her with a peculiar smile.

"Why do you look at me so strangely?" inquired Lois, after an embarrassing pause.

Without answering the query, he made one in his turn.

It was this:

"Lois, answer me truly. Have you ever been a somnambulist—in the habit of walking in your sleep, you know?"

She started, turning slightly pale.

Before she could answer, her father, Mr. Reuben Calthorpe, entered the room.

He confronted the young man, however, rather with embarrassment than unkindness, though his manner was likewise stern.

"You needn't go, sir—at least not at this moment," said he. "As for you, Lois, it is late, and you look as if you needed rest."

Lois at once quitted the room.

Mr. Calthorpe remained silent for a moment.

He was a much younger man than the brother who had been murdered, and a handsome man withal, but with bad eyes and a weak mouth.

"I would like to discover how much you know, sir," he managed to say at last.

"About what?"

"Well, in the first place, do you know why I have been opposed to your paying your addresses to my daughter?"

"Yes."

"Why, then?"

"Because I am poor, for one thing."

"You are mistaken. I have mostly been poor myself, and your poverty would not have been an insuperable objection, though, like most men, I am fond of money, and the ease which it alone seems to bring."

"Well, then, it was because you preferred Carolus Digby as a suitor for your daughter's hand."

"Ah! hum! that was about it." This with a rather timid look askance. "And yet I don't much like Digby, either."

"Of course you don't; and, being a gentleman, you can't. Mr. Calthorpe, are you prepared for me to tell you why?"

"Yes, perhaps so—that is—what do you mean, sir?"

"I mean just this: that the man is not only a gambler but a desperado and a thief; and that you know it. I will give you the credit, however, of believing that you have not known it until recently."

Mr. Calthorpe had turned white.

"You know this?" he faltered.

"Yes, sir, and more. What the adventurer's real or original name is perhaps no one but himself knows. But years ago he was a criminal under the graphic sobriquet of Cracksman Charley. He may have had a hundred aliases since, and at the present time he is the secret associate of robbers and murderers."

A look, almost of terror, came into Mr. Calthorpe's face.

But the detective, remembering only the injustice that had been done him, was resolved not to spare him.

"I know yet more than I have told you," said he, in a low, significant voice.

Mr. Calthorpe gave a start, but the detective continued, remorselessly:

"I also know the secret of that man's power over you!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

JUSTICE.

"You do not—you cannot know that!" Mr. Calthorpe burst out.

"Ah, but I do. It is not alone through a fraternity of gambling instincts that the vile, crime-

stained adventurer, at present calling himself Carolus Digby, has persisted in coming, forbidden to this house—in offering his court to that angel of purity, your daughter Lois."

Mr. Calthorpe glared at him, and then inspected the door, to be sure that no one was eaves-dropping.

"'Tis false!" he hoarsely exclaimed. "There is nothing else. It is—I confess it—solely through my unconquerably vicious taste for gambling that Carolus Digby has thus far controlled me."

The detective slowly shook his head. "There is something else," he said. "That man holds you, Mr. Reuben Calthorpe, under his remorseless thumb, and there is another, a particular cause for it."

The other licked his lips together, as if they were parched.

"What is it?" he gasped, as if anticipating, yet fearing, the answer.

"He carries it upon his person, and its face-value is two thousand dollars!"

Mr. Calthorpe gave a sort of cry, and he reeled into a chair.

"True, true, true!" he murmured, burying his face in his hands. "God help me!"

The detective was touched.

"Be of better heart, sir!" said he, kindly. "I have not told you this to exult over your humiliation—much as I may have been justly provoked to do so—but to offer you my help—my friendship."

"What! you will help me?"

He was looking up eagerly.

"Here is my hand on it!"

The extended hand was warmly accepted.

"God bless you, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Calthorpe, fervently. "I have wronged you—I see it now—but amends may be in my power at some future time. Good-night, sir, good-night!"

Nothing more was said.

Upon quitting Mr. Calthorpe, the detective, hurried to the arched gateway, where he found Jardine impatiently awaiting him.

"It is very late," said Jardine, "and I was greatly tempted to go without you."

"Go where?"

"To my sister's house. Read this."

He handed the other a scrap of paper, at the same time striking a taper match for him to read it by.

The paper contained these words, hastily scrawled:

"MON AMANT ADORE:—I go, whither I know not, because I must—because she will kill me if I obey not, and in silence. Oh, *mon ami*! why do you go away, why did you leave me? She, my beautiful and once idolized mistress, has become a jealous fury, an exacting tyrant, and I am but her trembling slave. But if I can escape, I will go to the house of your married sister that you once told me of. Adieu, *mon cher*! My heart is heavy. JUSTINE."

"When did you receive this?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"Who gave it to you?"

"Little Clip."

"Clip?"

"Yes."

"Why, Issie told me she dismissed her several days ago."

But she has been hanging around here, off and on, ever since."

"What did the girl say?"

"Nothing more than that Justine managed to slip it into her hand as she was passing out to the coach with her mistress."

"Shall you go to your sister's house now?"

"Instantly, and you with me."

"Where is it?"

"A cottage fronting the west side of Mount Morris Square."

"Come on!"

They were still passing along the garden-wall, when Clip put in a fresh appearance, confidently plucking Mainwaring by the sleeve.

"He's sneakin' around in there!" said she, with a suggestive gesture. "I see'd him creep over from the vacant lot."

"Who is he—whom do you mean?"

"The howlin' swell, though he ain't much on the swell just now—Digby."

Mainwaring paused, irresolute.

Should he return to warn Mr. Calthorpe, or keep on with Luke?

Curiosity as to Justine's revelation, should she be found, proved paramount.

He gave the child a handful of nickels for her devotion, passed on with his friend, and speedily forgot the information in what was destined to follow.

Jardine's married sister was a Mrs. Whitmore, who had never as yet been introduced to her younger brother's intended.

She said that a young woman, giving the name of Justine Deschappelles, had called at her house half an hour previously.

She had anxiously inquired as to the whereabouts of Mrs. Whitney's brother, mentioning that she was his betrothed; and then, on being unable to obtain the information, had begged to be allowed to remain overnight, vaguely averring that she was in fear of her life from some one who was pursuing her, and of whom she seemed to be in great fear.

While this conversation was going on another

carriage than the one that had brought Justine was driven up. Out of it there sprung a very beautiful but very much incensed young lady, who lost not a moment in rushing through the small garden and up to the porch, in which Justine and Mrs. Whitmore were conversing.

Justine had at once manifested the utmost terror and confusion, but had forthwith been dragged away by the other, before whom she had suddenly become strangely dumb and subservient. Then she had been thrust into the carriage; her mistress, as Mrs. Whitmore took the other to be, had followed, and they had been driven away.

Such was Mrs. Whitmore's story.

It was related to Jardine and Mainwaring at the gate of the lady's cottage garden.

The street on this side of Mount Morris Park, which is one of the choicest localities in the Harlem district, is always retired and lonely at night.

The lady had scarcely concluded her remarkable tale, and neither of the young men had had an opportunity to question her thereon, when a rapidly-driven close coach was observed approaching from the south.

It drew up at the gate, and as a young woman sprung out without waiting for assistance, Jardine ran to her with a joyous exclamation.

A hurried but rapturous embrace was the result, for the fresh comer was Justine.

"Ah! you are here again?" cried Mrs. Whitmore.

Justine dismissed the coach with a gesture, and, pulling her lover along, ran up to the gate, where the others had remained.

"Yes, madame, I am back again!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "And now you will not let her carry me away, will you? But no!" with a fond glance at Luke, and a glad one at his companion; "now I am sure of protection. And yet"—she shuddered—"if she should track me again I shall surely go mad! She will kill me, I know she will!"

"Compose yourself, my darling!" said her lover. "No one shall harm you."

"And you shall remain here with me," said Mrs. Whitmore. "As my brother's affianced wife, you shall not want shelter and protection."

The Gliding Detective also spoke some reassuring words.

"Where did you journey to?" inquired Justine's lover, when she had regained something of composure.

"Ah, I hardly know. To some small hotel back in the country, where mademoiselle kept me *constamment* under the spell of her eyes, which can be like the basilisk, for all that they are so beautiful. And *continuellement* she would say, 'If you attempt to escape or speak, my little Justine, I will surely kill you by slow torture.' *Mon Dieu!* as if the torture was not already and *incessamment*. But to-night I managed to elude her, and come back to the city. Ah! but she was on my track like a tigress. I believe she is *clairvoyante*. Nothing escapes her. Madame, here, knows how she tore me away."

"Yes; we have heard the story. But where are you last from?"

"From a hotel near Central Park. Ah, she will track me once more. I feel sure. Then I shall die!"

"You'll do nothing of the sort," cried Jardine, half-angrily. "You will merely say that you have had enough of her service, and will have no more of it. I shall be here."

Mainwaring here interposed.

"Let me suggest a way out of the difficulty," said he.

"Oh, do so, monsieur! You are so clever, so wise!"

"Thank you. My proposition is this: It is evident that your young mistress has been subjecting you to this despotism of hers—terrorizing you—through a haunting fear on her own part lest you should betray some precious secret of hers that is also in your possession."

"Ah, monsieur, it is true! That is a certainty."

"Well, why not throw off her power over you here and now, this very instant, and with but few words?"

"In what way, monsieur?"

"By divulging the secret."

Justine clasped her hands.

"Ah, if I but dared!" she murmured.

"Dared?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"But it does not involve a crime?"

"A crime! Oh, no, monsieur; it is scarcely a crime. And yet—"

"What does it concern, Justine?" cried her lover.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* a marriage."

"Come, then, tell us at once!" again interposed Mainwaring, this time with stern impatience.

"Do so, my dear!" urged Mrs. Whitmore. "Even if you have promised not to reveal it—"

"But I have never made a sworn promise, madame. It is but recently that mademoiselle has suspected my knowledge of it."

"Well, then, confide it to us at once. By this means alone can you destroy her tyranny over you."

Justine hesitated.

"I shall do it!" she exclaimed, with sudden energy. "You shall know all—you especially, monsieur—to Mainwaring—for it chiefly concerns your happiness."

They all leaned forward expectantly—Mainwaring in an agony of suspense.

The longed-for avowal seemed trembling on the edge of her lips.

Then she gave a stifled cry, and pointed back, down the street, along which a fresh coach was seen to be approaching at a furious pace.

"Hal! I knew it!" she cried, white to the lips. "Mademoiselle has tracked me again—she is here—she will kill me!"

They strove to compose her, Jardine even taking her in his arms.

But in another moment the new coach had come to a stop, and it was indeed Issie who sprung out of it.

Radiantly beautiful, notwithstanding a stern and set paleness that overspread her features, her brows were knitted, and a cold, resentful look gleamed in her eyes as they rested on the trembling Frenchwoman, as if oblivious of aught else.

But as she recognized the young woman's protectors, there was instantly a change.

She staggered back, as if struck, and every expression gave way to a wild, despairing look.

Mainwaring, on his part, was, in spite of his disappointment, suddenly stricken with a sense of compunction, not to say of shame.

He advanced a step toward her.

She motioned the coachman to drive out of hearing, and, when he had done so, herself withdrew a little further apart.

As she seemed to be awaiting him, the detective approached.

"Has she told you yet?" were her first words.

There was such an agony of suspense in them that he pitied her yet more profoundly.

"Justine has not yet spoken your secret," he replied. "But the delay is but for a few brief moments. She was on the point of making the revelation when your arrival sealed her lips."

She drew a long sigh, which, however, was not one of relief.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AFTER THE REVELATION.

THEN there was a fiercer change, her eyes flashed, she thrust her hand into the bosom of her costume.

Was she contemplating an assassin's spring upon the French girl as a last resort for the security of that treasured secret?

No; or it was but an instant's paroxysm, if existent at all.

The settled hopelessness and despair were upon her once more, and more absolutely, more pitifully than before.

The detective's sympathy went out strongly and humanely to this beautiful creature, so forlorn and so lost in her mysterious anguish.

"Issie," he began, "whatever I have done has been in the line of my duty. But, believe me, I feel for you profoundly. If any sympathy or gentleness that I can bestow—"

She silenced him by a gesture, grand in its simplicity and its scorn.

"What do I want with sympathy or gentleness?" was the language of that gesture, plainer and more forcible than if spoken. "Would you give stones to the famishing, vinegar-draughts to the dying of thirst? With your love only could you satisfy the heart-hunger of which I perish, and you have not that to give."

So vivid was it all, that she seemed really to have spoken, and he found himself unconsciously considering her significance just as if the words were fresh-fallen from her lips.

"But, Issie, this is simple madness!" said he, in an expostulating way. "Good heavens! could you actually think to terrify that girl into silence through a whole life-time, and against her own heart-affair? I can't think of such a thing as possible, or even conceivable. It seems preposterous."

She was looking at him steadily, mournfully.

Her lips moved, but no sound issued from them.

"Or let us look at it in a still better light," he went on, as if replying to some fresh argument she had advanced. "How much better to yield up a burdensome secret, freely and at any cost, than to have it constantly terrorizing one's own life?"

Suddenly he seemed to realize that she had not actually said anything.

"Why don't you speak to me?" he asked. "Come, Issie, have you forgotten the confidence that you lately reposed in me? Beautiful as you must needs be, you are not looking well. Are you ill? Is there not something I can do for you?"

Without withdrawing her gaze, she shook her head slowly, silently, forlornly.

He would have gone on, but she silenced him with another gesture, this time a passionate and desperate one.

Then, suddenly seizing his hand and kissing it, she sped away up the dim street, like the fitting of a ghost.

He watched her till she had sprung into the carriage that was awaiting her at the adjacent corner, and was driven away.

Then, moodily and with something like self-reproach, he returned to the little group at the cottage gate.

The touch of her lips had been as the touch of ice, and somehow he felt that that kiss upon his hand was an everlasting farewell.

"Justine," he said, gravely, "your thralldom is at an end. Let us go into the house—that is, if Mrs. Whitmore has no objections."

In the house Justine told her mistress's secret.

The revelation was a most extraordinary one, and one that caused a weight of doubt and perplexity to be lifted from the detective's heart, to be succeeded by a sense of quiet and content.

But it had not long been made, though the telling of it in Justine's peculiar way occupied the greater part of an hour, before a messenger came from Rose Hill, hurriedly inquiring for Mr. Mainwaring.

The detective recognized the messenger as Issie's own coachman.

"My young mistress is very ill, sir," said the man. "Indeed, it is not expected that she can survive. She beseeches that you will come to her at once."

Mainwaring lost not an instant in accompanying the man.

"Is the physician in attendance?" was his first question after they had started for Rose Hill.

"Yes, sir—Dr. Jackman."

"What seems to be the matter?"

"My mistress, it is feared, has taken poison."

The detective shuddered.

"When did it happen?"

"Soon after she unexpectedly came home from her journey, sir, but a short time ago."

"What particulars do you know?"

"Very few, sir. After my young mistress's arrival—wholly unexpected, as I said before, sir—she paid no attention to the servant who were quickly gathered in the hall to greet her return, but just passed up the stairs looking like a dead-alive woman, as our housemaid expressed it, sir."

"Yes, yes!"

"She came back alone—that is, without Ma'm'zelle Justine, her maid, sir—and Mary—that's the housemaid, and a good, hard-working, conscientious girl, sir—asked if she mightn't wait on her in her budwore, sir."

"When was she taken sick?" demanded the detective, fiercely.

"Yes, sir. I'm coming right to it, sir. My young mistress, sir, she went right on, without seeing or hearing of us, and all we knowed was she slamming of her budwore door. But pretty soon her bell rung, and Mary, after answering it, came tottering down again, whiter'n any ghost, and saying, scared-like: 'Where's James? He's to run for Mr. Mainwaring at once, and Richard's to fetch the doctor, on my responsibility. Miss Issie has tuk poison!' Well, sir, afore I could get my d'rections as to where to find you, Dr. Jackman, whose house isn't far away, you know, came hurrying in, and then—"

The detective abruptly silenced his loquacity, and the mansion-house was quickly reached.

Its two households were still so sharply separated that the wing occupied by Reuben Calthorpe and his family was wrapped in slumber-suggesting darkness, while the remainder of the mansion was alive with twinkling lights, in painful testimony of the tragic excitement within.

Doctor Jackman was awaiting the detective's arrival just outside the door of Issie's apartments.

"Is there no hope?" asked the detective.

"None."

"Is my presence so earnestly desired?"

"Yes; and it may relieve the sufferer's distress, which is, strangely enough, chiefly mental."

"Shall I go in now?"

"Yes; it is for the best."

But as the detective was on the point of entering, the physician grasped his arm, and whispered, impressively:

"If she is equal to it, find out the truth as to those murders!"

Mainwaring repelled him, almost angrily.

"The double crime is no longer a mystery," he replied. "And, even were it otherwise, she should not be questioned concerning it!"

The next instant, followed by the physician, he was in the presence of the dying girl.

Partly undressed, and propped high by the pillows of her sumptuous couch, with a weeping domestic at either side, Issie lay with closed eyes, the pallor of approaching death already upon her face.

Her hands were crossed upon her breast, but one of them was tightly clinched, as if closing fast upon something precious to the last.

Light as was the detective's footfall over the tufted floor, it caused her to start and open her eyes.

She motioned the servants to withdraw, and Dr. Jackman conducted them to the further end of the grand and palatial sleeping apartment—Issie's tastes had ever been of the most luxurious—where he judiciously remained himself.

Then her eyes dilated as they dwelt lingering-

ly upon the man she loved, and a faint color came into her cheeks, though the lips were smileless.

Mainwaring would have spoken, but an eloquent slight gesture entreated his silence.

She would gaze on him, nothing more. The time for speech by word of mouth was past.

Mainwaring was no longer able to feel as profound a commiseration for Issie as before learning the particulars of Justine's revelation—indeed, he was now aware of the full extent to which she had wronged him, and in a way that was only pardonable through an excess of magnanimity on his part—but, nevertheless, he felt that that lustrous dying gaze of hers was penetrating to his very soul with a burden of contrition that it was neither manly nor human to reject.

Heedless of her mutely expressed desire to the contrary, he spoke.

"Does Lois know of this?" he asked. "Shall I not bring her to you?"

A passionate refusal was embodied in her answering gesture, feeble as it was.

"Let me only look at you!" was the last speech of those burning eyes. "Do not deny me this. Soon I shall be nothing, but only let me look at you to the last!"

Presently she started up, and pressed into his grasp a scrap of paper—it was that which she had been so jealousy clutching.

"Good-by—forgive!"

The words were just articulate.

Then she was dead.

The scrap of paper contained these words, doubtless written just prior to swallowing the fatal draught:

"Whatever Justine may reveal to you is the truth; but oh, I loved you so!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DAWN.

THE Gliding Detective was quitting the mansion-house, unaccompanied, and a hush had fallen upon the illuminated part of it, in which death was now a silent guest, that was no less profound than that which shrouded the darkened wing thereof, wherein sleep alone was visitor.

But just as he was about passing out of the entrance; with perhaps a lingering thought of Lois, and the news he would bring her in the morning, the muffled report of a pistol reached his ears.

He made sure that it was from the further extremity of the darkened wing, and at once rushed in that direction.

Confused voices reached him from above.

He knew there was a minor staircase at this side, found it, groped his way up, and came before the door of a room from which the voices proceeded, though by this time they had almost ceased.

After some hesitation, he entered.

It was Reuben Calthorpe's sleeping room, and, as a light was burning, a tragic spectacle presented itself.

Mr. Calthorpe, undressed, was standing over the motionless and prostrate form of a roughly clad man of powerful proportions.

In one hand was a still-smoking revolver, in the other a slip of paper in the form of a bank check, evidently just abstracted from the fallen man's person.

The latter had just breathed his last.

He had been shot in the breast, and his features were set in a sinister, threatening look that had become frozen there.

They were the features of the adventurer, Carolus Digby, *alias* Billings, *alias* Cracksmen Charley.

Mr. Calthorpe turned a white but exultant face to the detective.

"Howsoever you are here," he exclaimed, "your visit is welcome. I call you to witness that this man was killed by me while in the commission of a burglary! But wait!"

He ran to the gas-jet, glanced at the face of the paper, and held it into the flame until it was thoroughly consumed, the last vestige burning up against his fingers.

"You understand?" he then asked, with another anxious glance at the detective.

"I do, sir," was the grave reply. "And permit me to say, sir, that this night's adventure has been a singularly fortunate one for you."

"I know that."

He pointed from the freshly vacated bed to the open window, with an overturned chair beside it, by which the midnight entrance had been effected.

Mainwaring asked no questions.

In view of the satisfactory results, including the desperado's death, it was immaterial to him what—whether of exasperating demands or an actual burglarious attempt—had provoked the fortunately fatal shot.

Mr. Calthorpe had recovered his composure, and was dressing himself with an air of great satisfaction.

"This is well, sir," said the detective. "A visit to the other side of the house may be in order, after you shall have notified the authorities of this affair."

"What is the matter?"

"Miss Issie Calthorpe has just died by her own hand."

While the other was staring at him, Lois, fully dressed, came quickly into the room.

Her features were set, her step mechanical, her eyes open but unseeing, a small lamp was in her hand.

It was a case of sleep-walking.

Mr. Calthorpe cast an embarrassed look toward the detective.

"My daughter is only thus occasionally," said he. "She has been so from her childhood."

"And you have kept it a family secret? I suppose?"

"Yes."

"That was wrong, when proper medical treatment might long ago have effected a cure."

"You think so?"

"I know it. At all events, it was nothing to be ashamed of."

"Of course not!"

"And yet had it not been kept a close secret, it might have cost two hearts a vast amount of suffering that has been undergone."

"What do you mean? Do you refer indirectly to your doubtful marriage, of which I have had some vague intimations?"

"Not indirectly, but directly."

"Explain, if you please."

"All in good time, my dear, sir. Wait!"

The somnambulist, after setting her lamp on her father's dressing case, had come to a perplexed pause, her hand touching her forehead.

"They are lost or stolen," was murmured from her barely moving lips. "I must find them, I must find them!"

The detective drew to her side, with his gliding step.

"What has been lost or stolen?" he asked, modulating his voice to the same mechanical tone. "What are the missing things that must be found?"

"My ring—Guy's wedding-ring, and the marriage-certificate."

"Are you fresh from the ceremony, then?"

"Yes, yes; we have just been married. But my ring and the paper—I cannot find them—I have been robbed of them!"

Mainwaring made a sign for the astonished parent to approach.

"Are you somewhat enlightened, sir?" he asked.

"Completely so."

"It will not do for your daughter to come to herself here." With a gesture toward the dead robber. "I will conduct her to the reception-room. In the mean time, you will lose no time in notifying the police of your adventure."

Mr. Calthorpe hesitated—he was, unfortunately, a man more than half of whose life had been given to one sort of hesitation or another.

"Wouldn't it be as well, or better," he suggested, "for you to notify the police, while I—"

"No, it wouldn't!" The detective's face hardened. "See; the daylight is coming. It has been a night of surprises. Let us lose no time."

With that, he took up the lamp, and, gently taking the sleep-walker's hand, led her, unresistingly, from the room.

It was only after the reception-room had been reached, and the door closed behind them, that he ventured to arouse the young girl out of her tranced condition, and explain the immediate situation.

This was, naturally, only effected with some difficulty and embarrassment, but Lois was at last made to understand.

"What is that?" she asked, as the steps of several men were heard moving heavily along the adjoining passage.

"It is doubtless the police carrying away the body," was the reply.

She shuddered.

"What an end for that bad and unscrupulous man!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; a most inappropriate end!"

"I didn't mean in that sense."

"But I do. It was an unfitting end."

"Why?"

"Because he should have been hanged. It is melancholy, this cheating the judicial rope. It always causes me painful reflections."

"Oh!—My father will be justified, I hope?"

"Without a doubt."

"How glad I am that I did not come to my senses in that room."

"I saw to that."

"You were very considerate."

"Thank you."

"Did I say anything—speak aloud?"

"Yes." And he told her dream-emitted words.

"How strange!" she murmured. "Why do I have that foolish dream repeated so persistently?"

"Lois, it is because it is no dream—or rather the truth reflected and re-enacted in a dream."

"What can you mean?"

"Just this, that you are my wife, although you doubtless married me in your sleep!"

"Can it be possible?" She passed her hand over her forehead.

"It is a certainty!"

"How do you know this?"

"Through two guilty confessions."

"Confessions?"

"Yes; or rather, a revelation, on the part of Justine Deschappelles, subsequently confirmed by Issie's lips."

"By Issie? I am all in a whirl! But her claim to have been married to you?"

"All a falsehood, a vile plot, doubtless never conceived or attempted before!"

"But she possessed the wedding ring—the certificate."

"After she had stolen them from you. Justine witnessed the theft, and has testified to it, with full particulars."

"This is amazing. I can't for the life of me understand."

"Of course not, but you shall be enlightened at once. Here is the story. You were married to me in your sleep-walking trance. Your return to your room was remarked by Issie, who followed you, at first doubtless out of pure curiosity. But she was enabled to question you and receive answers (just as I did, a short time ago) without your becoming aroused. From this she gathered the particulars of your strange marriage, which were destined to assume such a blank in your memory during your waking hours. Issie then conceived and executed the first step in her unparalleled plot. She deprived you of both ring and certificate, and—well, you can guess the rest. Her adopted name being identical with yours, lent wondrous verisimilitude to her astounding claim. For the rest, she seems to have somehow cherished an unconquerable passion for me, which was the inspiring motive of it all."

Lois had grown pale, but it was the pallor of suppressed indignation.

"What?" she exclaimed; "and Justine was the witness?"

"Yes; she had seen her mistress following you, and had curiously followed her in her turn. She secretly witnessed the entire transaction, and then fled back to her own apartment."

"But why did she keep back her revelation to this late day?"

"For two reasons. First, her love for Issie, and finally, when the latter came to know of her knowledge, through an overmastering fear of her vengeance. The little Frenchwoman is not a heroine at her best, and Issie's powerful will and bold character were enabled to terrorize her for a time. It was only through the insistence of Jardine, who is her betrothed lover, that she made a clean breast to us at last."

Lois set her teeth, and her hands clinched convulsively.

She paced the floor in access of indignation that Mainwaring would not have deemed her capable of.

"And she corroborated her maid's shameful story?" she exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Why are you so cool, so quiet over it, Guy?" she burst out. "Have we not both been equally imposed upon, equally duped, equally outraged?"

"Yes; and by one whose ill-governed passion must be her excuse."

"Excuse! There is no excuse for such treachery, such infamy!"

"Death excuses much."

"Death?"

"Issie is dead."

"Dead? Oh, Guy!"

He told her all.

Lois threw herself into a chair, and burst out crying.

"Oh, what a house is this for tragic happenings!" she sobbed. "I am frightened, I am half beside myself!"

He drew her, all unresisting now, into his embrace.

"You shall therefore soon quit it, this ill-omened house, with me!" he murmured, imprinting a kiss upon the tear-dimmed eyes, the tear-stained cheeks, the trembling lips. "My wife, my beloved, my darling! henceforth we are one, to sever and to part no more."

"Yes, Guy, forever and ever!" she sobbed. "We have suffered so much, and henceforth we are to be happy, I am sure. But oh, Guy! she was so young, so bright, so beautiful and so courageous!"

"And so ill-starred! Let that be added, rather than to add that she was so wicked."

"Yes, Guy, that is well. We all have our faults, and if poor Issie's were exceptional, so were her many good qualities."

"Enough of this, my beloved! Away with these tears! Joy is rising for us like the sun of this new morning that is broadening so brightly and so freshly. My love, my bride!"

She at last smiled at him through her tears.

"My parents!" she presently murmured.

"I think I can answer for Mr. Calthorpe's satisfaction," said the lover-husband, rather dryly. "And as for your worthy mother, my dear—well, if she should object to her son-in-law, it will be strictly on the quiet, I confidently predict."

But Mainwaring's present happiness was so great, so unalloyed, that even the thought of Mrs. Calthorpe in the light of a mother-in-law could not diminish it.

But Lois only submitted a moment to his passionate embrace before disengaging herself from his arms.

"There is still something else," she faltered, casting down her eyes. "We cannot be happy—ought not to—before that."

"What is it, my darling?"

"We must be married over again. 'Don't you—don't you see that we must?'"

He checked a laugh, and grew as grave as she.

"You are perfectly right," he admitted.

"And our remarriage—let it be a wakeful one this time, Lois!"

Then the suppressed laugh would have its way, and Lois joined in it.

"You have been the chief sufferer in the past, Guy," said she, after a pause.

"Candidly speaking, my dear Lois, I believe I have been."

"I know it. On that account I am going to surrender a privilege to you."

"You are going to let me fix and name and arrange the new marriage?"

"Yes—but you won't be inconsiderately hasty?"

"No; so I shall set the matter at rest instantly. We shall be privately married to-morrow morning."

"Oh, Guy! so soon, and with Issie's death—"

"You must remember that it will not be a marriage, but a mere formal ratification of what has already taken place. Sha'n't I go on?"

She bowed her face upon his shoulder in assent.

"Very well. We shall be privately married at noon to-morrow, by a justice of the peace who is a personal friend of mine, in the presence of your father and mother, my friend Luke Jardine, and Justine Deschappelles, his affianced."

She bowed her head in the affirmative, but without looking up.

"Why by a justice of the peace, Guy?" she presently asked.

"Because it is best and soundest and fittest in that way."

"Of course, I consent. But why?"

"Marriage is a civil contract, is it not?"

"But also a religious rite."

"But first and over all, a civil right. When couples wish to get unmarried, to what jurisdiction do they and can they only apply—to a church or to a court of law? Is it anything but consistent and rational that the same authority which can alone nullify should be the one to create or bind?"

"True, darling! I never thought of that before, and it is unanswerable. But, Guy—"

"I know just what you are going to say." And, with his arms around her, he kissed the blushing upturned face.

"What?"

"That there is no possible danger of our ever wishing to be unmarried."

"Well, isn't it true?"

"True? Ah, my angel, perfectly so!"

CHAPTER XL.

BROAD DAY.

THE Gliding Detective had longed for the opportunity to unmask Old Newthe in the presence of his chief, and by a strange concatenation of circumstances, accidents or fatalities, or by a combination of all, he had his wish on that very day.

But the past forty-eight hours had been a period of such unexpected revelations, adventures and developments that an extra agreeable surprise or two—for there was yet another to follow—did not seem especially unnatural or startling.

What particular fatuity or temerity could have induced the criminal Tom Grimsby to reappear boldly in Mr. Winkerton's private office, in a resumption of his character of Old Newthe, has never been made apparent, but that he did do so toward the close of that day is none the less indubitable.

If it was the old villain's last attempt at "bluff" in the wild game of his desperate life, it was only another instance of the misleading short-sightedness or self-destructive shallowness which seems to be providentially somewhere inherent in a vicious personality—the one little overlooked loose screw in the hideous mechanism by which the entire structure is unexpectedly and irretrievably wrecked and destroyed.

"Why, hallo, Newthe!" was the unsuspecting chief's hearty greeting. "Where have you been hiding yourself, and how do you get on with Mainwaring in the great Rose Hill double murder and missing-will mystery case?"

Old Newthe was mumbling something in reply when the Gliding Detective floated into the office with his melodious step and noiseless grace.

Refreshed by a nap and bath, newly shaved, and dressed in his wonted exquisite and unobtrusive taste, the unscathed hero of so many life-and-death adventures and hairbreadth escapes was looking at his very best.

A momentary smile was succeeded by a look of quiet exultation and thankfulness on his manly face.

Then, without a word, he precipitated himself like an Alpine avalanche upon his man.

There was a desperate struggle, during which

the dust flew, the cuspidors shivered, and various articles of office furniture went into fragments.

"Hallo! hold on! What's this?" shouted the astounded chief, while the doorways were straightway filled with curious forms and grinning faces from the outer offices. Are you gone mad, Mainwaring? Let up—you'll kill the old chap! What are you doing?"

The struggle was by this time at an end.

"Only this," was the detective's cool reply, and click! the manacles were on his victim's wrists. "Send for a policeman, please. This man should be in the Tombs without delay, and I haven't time to take him there."

"In the Tombs? Why, that is Old Newthe, in whom you had such unlimited confidence!"

"Speak for yourself, if you please, Mr. Winkerton. Whatever confidence was placed in him by me was at your express desire, and that I am here alive to tell about it is still a matter of surprise to me."

"Who is he, then?"

"Ex-River Pirate Tom Grimsby—you ought to remember him of old—the murderer of Mr. Peregrine Calthorpe and Ichabod Taylor. Chief, you may count on claiming those rewards, with a good chance of getting them."

After his defeat, the prisoner had remained silent, with his head bowed, nor would he vouchsafe to utter a syllable now.

He was presently taken in charge by a brace of police officers, and then Mainwaring unfolded the particulars of his wonderful tale to his astounded chief and his admiring brother detectives.

He had hardly finished when Luke Jardine entered with a fresh piece of welcome news.

"Dr. Wentworth, with old Mr. Fieldman in charge, is waiting for you in a carriage, Guy," said he. "He hailed me a few moments ago, and bade me fetch you."

"What's up? Surely, our old opium-eater can't have recovered his memory so soon?"

"But he has, though—at least so far as the Calthorpe interests are concerned. He remembers the later will perfectly, and the exact nook in his old rattletrap of an office where he stowed it away, together with some other valuable papers, a short time previous to his being captured by Mrs. Bentincke and her gang. You and I are to go with him now, in order to secure it."

Mainwaring lost not another instant in accompanying his friend.

When the pair separated from Dr. Wentworth and his charge, less than an hour later, the missing will was in their possession.

It was of six weeks later date than the one that Issie's lawyer had offered for probate, and, as it was duly attested and in every respect genuine, it of course took precedence over the other.

By this last will and testament of Peregrine Calthorpe, the entire princely estate of the testator, amounting to something over a million, and subject only to a moderate life-income payable to his only brother, Reuben Calthorpe, was bequeathed to his beloved niece, Lois Calthorpe, possession to be given when she should come of age, which would be but a few months from the present writing.

Our eventful story has drawn to a close.

The woman who has figured so disagreeably therein as Mrs. Bentincke was found, on the day following her criminal husband's arrest, wandering in the vicinity of Tarrytown, a hopeless maniac; and she died shortly afterward without recovering her reason, and consequently without a confession of the particulars, that might otherwise have been obtained from her, as to her part in the murderous plot whose development and counter-action has been the main motif in the foregoing tale.

But this want was supplied to the public's satisfaction by a brief written confession on the part of Grimsby, shortly prior to his suicide in prison, which took place a few days before the time fixed for his trial.

In that confession, he merely stated that he had executed the crimes at his wife's instigation, and with her assistance.

No mention was made of his daughter, and Issie's innocence or guilty foreknowledge in connection with the tragedy must forever remain an open question.

Jardine and Justine decided to be made man and wife at the same time fixed for the remarriage of the Gliding Detective and Lois Calthorpe; and the ceremonies were accordingly performed in civil court, the one following the other in swift succession.

If somewhat summarily celebrated, not the less have both marriages been fortunate and happy.

Luke Jardine and his wife are visiting in Europe at the present writing.

Mr. and Mrs. Mainwaring have a fine estate on the Hudson, where they spend the greater part of their time, with their children around them, and with but little of father or mother-in-law interference to disturb their felicity.

Little Clip is a servant in their household.

The doubtful marriage has become a certain and unalloyed bliss.

THE END.

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